A PENGUIN SPECIAL

LOUIS LÉVY



# THE TRUTH ABOUT FRANCE

Translated by
W. PICKLES



THE AUTHOR

Born in Paris 1895. Educated at Paris lycée and the Sorbonne, where he took degrees in both History and Law. Barrister-at-law, Paris. On leaving the Sorbonne, started his career as a journalist. Since 1920, on the staff of the *Populaire*, Socialist daily paper, founded by Jean Longuet and edited by Léon Blum, where he was, first, Political Correspondent, then Diplomatic Correspondent. In the latter capacity, he attended all the international conferences of the last few years. He also contributed to many political and literary periodicals (*Soir*, *Vendredi*, *Europe Nouvelle*, etc.) When the war broke out, he became War Correspondent of the *Populaire* and the *Petit Provençal*, as well as of *Europe Nouvelle* under the signature of Charras. Is the only French War Correspondent now in England.

Member of the Socialist Party since 1916, he was Secretary of the French Socialist League of Youth from 1926 to 1934 and member of the Executive of the Party from 1926 to 1939.

Author of: *Les Nuits du Cartel* (1929), *Comment ils sont devenus socialistes* (1932), *Vieilles histoires socialistes* (1933), *La Cravate à triple tour*, a novel (1936).

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## CHAPTER I

# THE MILITARY CAUSES OF THE COLLAPSE

### 1. THE FRENCH SOLDIER IS NOT TO BLAME

In a work intended to show how France was murdered, an examination of the military causes of the defeat must naturally take first place. It must, however, be understood that I make no claim to profound knowledge of military matters. It is not my intention to play either the strategist or the tactician. But from November, 1939, and up to the end of hostilities in France I left my duties as a diplomatic correspondent in order to become the war correspondent of my paper. I saw and noted many things. I tried to remember what I had seen, and found in it all food for long reflection.

I do not propose to examine minutely each battle, to describe as a historian the day-by-day course of the military events which in May and June led the French Army to disaster. For the purposes of this book my interest is limited to the more profound military causes, and if I find myself compelled to discuss in some detail the passage of the Meuse bridges, it is, as it were, by accident, in a section in which I shall seek to prove that the French soldier, better led, would have been worthy of a better fate. The military chapters, therefore, will contain only the brief outlines of the story, leaving wholly out of account, for instance, the defection of the King of the Belgians, though it was this event which precipitated the catastrophe. All that this chapter seeks to do is to bring out the fundamental blunders of the General Staff and the acts of treachery that marked the final stages.

ARMY MORALE.

I have, however, one first duty to accomplish: I must pay my own tribute to the French soldier as I saw him. As the last stages approached, it had been my intention, together with some of my colleagues among the war correspondents, to describe the morale of the French Army during the war of 1939–1940. As the cataclysm drew near our presentiment grew that the day must come when criminal or incompetent leaders would try to lay the blame for the defeat, either on the French soldier or, by extension, on his teachers and on the Third Republic which had formed those teachers. We all felt that the war correspondents, as reliable witnesses, should produce their evidence. My friends and colleagues are, alas, still in France, where they cannot write freely. But since I am not so placed, it would be unpardonable of me not to keep my promise.

Some superficial observers were surprised by certain features that marked the beginning of the war. They remembered 1914, the enthusiasm on the boulevards, the Marseillaise, the rifles hung with flowers, the shouts of "On to Berlin!" And they were surprised to find nothing in the scenes of the mobilisation of 1939 to remind them of this rather jingo excitement. What they failed to understand was the tragic reality that can be summarised in one sentence, and that must condition every judgment of my countrymen: *between* 1914 *and* 1918 *France lost one million five hundred thousand men.*

Among those mobilised in 1939 were many who had fought in the last war. Nearly all had passed their childhood or their youth amid those tragic years, lacking paternal care, living with a mother whose every hour was passed in anxious waiting for news of the absent soldier. These men had had, in other words, no childhood and no youth, and when one day they awakened to manhood they had lived side by side with mourning and tragedy for longer than is normal in the life of adults in the forties. And so from their earliest years they had learned to detest war. They knew—and our sentimental pacifists rubbed it well

in—that it was no longer an affair of bright uniforms and shining swords, to be welcomed as the cadets of our military colleges had welcomed it in 1914. They knew of the mud and blood and mutilations and endless tortures of mind and body that it would bring with it. Is it, then, surprising that in September, 1939, the ribbons and flowers and the patriotic songs of Paul Déroulède were missing?

But it would be a grievous error to conclude from this that the soldier of 1939 was a bad soldier or that his morale left something to be desired. I can affirm from my own experience that the contrary is the case. It is no doubt true that our soldiers showed a marked distaste for pseudo-heroic literature and had no use for the pen-and-ink warriors of the Press; they had not forgotten the mass of newspaper nonsense produced by the last war, or the evils that followed in its train. But they were resolute and determined, ready for heroism, though not for bravado, and they knew perfectly well what they were fighting for. It is true that they showed no taste for fine words and spoke very little of the war, but when once one could get them to talk it was easy to see that their ideas were perfectly sound. The ideas were there, but they were reluctant to bring them into the light of day, and in any case were too fully occupied by their daily duties to spend much time in reflection. All the same, they were perfectly clear as to their own motives: although for the most part they had followed recent events only distantly, and were in fact rather ignorant in matters of foreign policy, they knew that the Governments of the democratic countries had gone to the extreme limit of concession. They thought that Hitlerite Germany was responsible for the war and must be beaten. It was, of course, perfectly natural that they should hope for a short war, but nothing in what they said led me to believe that they imagined it could end before Hitler had received the punishment he deserved. The kind of remark one constantly heard was, "We can't have this sort of thing every twenty-five years. *Il faut en finir*." I defy anyone who lived with our soldiers during the nine months of war to contradict me on this point.

COMMUNISTS AND FASCISTS.

I have heard references to Communist influences in the army and to certain pacifist tendencies. In a later chapter I shall take the opportunity to give details about the Communist attitude during the war and to show how Communist propaganda was in practice unable to exercise any real influence at the front. Here it must suffice for me to say that at the front I found only the faintest and most infrequent traces, I will not say of pacifist propaganda, but of pacifist feeling coming occasionally to the surface. The attitude of the Communists must inevitably have had some influence on the most active members of the Party who were in the army, and it is difficult to believe that the ultra-pacifist teachers changed their opinions overnight. But all that will occupy only a very small place in the picture I am trying to paint. Mobilisation had brought together men of all opinions and was slowly making of them a truly national army, especially at the front itself.

In the same way, I shall have little to say of the Fascist officers. There is no doubt that they existed, especially among the younger reserve officers. For months they had been poisoned by papers like *Gringoire* and its breed. But everything led one to believe that, without having in any way abandoned their pre-war views, they were conscious of the danger from outside and of the necessity for defending their country. (*Gringoire* itself, moreover, affected a patriotic attitude, without attempting to establish any logical sequence between its present and its former attitudes.) I believe that the poison on which they had been fed was still in their systems, and when France was defeated and Pétain triumphed it became virulent again. But in the early days of the war, these young Fascists were prepared to forget, at least for the time being, their praises of the totalitarian régimes. If they were still fertile in invective against the men of the Popular Front, this was just an old habit dying hard, and they were quite ready to imagine that they had never admired Hitler, or even Mussolini. Some of them even seemed to have returned to the pre-war

nationalism of the French Right; they talked of dismembering Germany and made vague references to the treaty of Westphalia, of which they had only the most elementary notions. However that may be, if in fact there had been any fighting, most of them would have behaved like true soldiers, and many indeed did behave very well in the advanced posts.

I had in fact many opportunities of noting what a large part ignorance and stupidity played in the formation of their opinions. It needed no special knowledge of psychology to recognise them easily when I arrived in an officers' mess. The introduction of "Louis Lévy, correspondent of the *Populaire*" sometimes provoked a start and an embarrassed handshake. But when the meal was over, and they had begun to realise that the "colleague of Léon Blum" did not, in fact, either eat with his fingers or dip his bread in the soup, that he could discuss other things besides politics, that he appreciated as much as they did the beauties of his country, that his knowledge of French literature and French art was as great as theirs—perhaps, if I may say so without being suspected of boasting, even greater—then the evening ended in an atmosphere of cordiality, and some of them even began to think they had perhaps been too severe in their judgments of the Socialists.

All this may seem a little puerile, but the foolishness and simple-mindedness of gentlemen of this ilk has too often been underestimated. In any rational explanation of Fascism, stupidity must take first place.

### The Officers.

As a general rule, the morale of the officers was good. It must be remembered that from the rank of captain upwards, most of the officers had served in the last war. For the most part, they were men who had forgotten nothing of the sufferings of the trenches. Their attitude towards their men was one of almost paternal care, and some young subalterns, less experienced and less sympathetic, had perforce to follow the example of the older men. I heard very few complaints indeed about excessive discipline or

harsh treatment. Most of the officers, especially at the front, paid careful attention to the feeding of their men. At the beginning they protested repeatedly against the incompetence of the Commissariat. Many of them, too, watched carefully over the morale of the troops. During the periods of inactivity the social side became very important, and some officers worked ceaselessly on this aspect. In the eighth army (the army of upper Alsace) every tiny village had its soldiers' hostel, and I cannot forget how Georges Monnet, who was an artillery Captain before he became Minister of Blockade, had organised hostels and libraries for his men and shown in a marked degree his ability to create bonds of confidence and friendship between himself and them.

Our army was in all truth the army of a democracy. Foreigners noted this fact with surprise and admiration. I have not forgotten a visit I paid to the advanced posts in Alsace in December with Colonel Béthouard, who distinguished himself later in the Norwegian campaign. In the company of an English and an American war correspondent, we passed a night in a concrete dug-out in the Vosges, a few hundred yards from the German front lines. A wood fire in an improvised fireplace gave us a faint light. The soldiers were lying on a long, straw-covered, wooden beam. We had brought food with us, which we shared with the troops, and the evening was passed in an atmosphere of the warmest cordiality. The officers ate and drank with the men and exchanged anecdotes, especially the Marseilles stories, which the French like as the English do Scotch and Irish stories. My English and American colleagues were astonished and delighted by the atmosphere of freedom they found in the French army, and which, it must be emphasised, was in no way harmful to discipline.

### The Advanced Posts.

The nearer one came to the front, the better the morale was. In the Maginot Line itself it was high. Life there was not so pleasant as the newspaper strategists liked to pretend, and the relative comfort did not, in my view,

make up for the absence of fresh air. But the men endured the conditions with good humour. It is not, however, of the Maginot Line proper that I wish to speak here, but of the men in the advanced posts in front of the line, among whom were to be found those whose attitude was the soundest of all. Officers and men alike put all their hearts into their work, though their tasks were of the kind that need a long and difficult apprenticeship. The fighting that went on from the advanced posts of Alsace and Lorraine was not only difficult; it was a kind that our men had never expected. It was a war of patrols, ambushes and surprise attacks, a red Indian warfare that required both the cunning and the courage of the trapper. It called at every moment for unceasing watchfulness, acute nervous tension and unlimited sang-froid. The soldiers had to sleep in inadequate dug-outs, and indeed often had no shelter at all, sleeping in the open air with their sleeping-sacks as their only cover, or curled up in shell holes, or simply stretched on the bare ground at the edge of a wood, in the mud, the yellow mud of Lorraine, or the reddish-brown mud of Alsace. Eyes and ears were constantly active; silence was essential and care was always taken to avoid a single unnecessary rifle-shot.

For operations of this kind, the German army was better trained than our metropolitan troops. The German soldiers, trained in Nazi youth camps or experienced in the kind of ambush and surprise attack that are the stock-in-trade of the S.A. and the S.S., were better fitted than our men for nocturnal expeditions, for reconnaissance in small groups, with dogs for liaison work. The Germans must have had months of training in infiltration tactics intended to disorganise, or to enable them to pick up a few prisoners. Nevertheless, our soldiers adapted themselves with surprising speed to this unexpected warfare. Within a few days, the French gift of adaptability began to show itself. In a very short time our patrols were as good as those of the enemy, and had learned all the arts of surprise. I know of officers and men who enjoyed this new kind of occupation. Volunteers were never lacking and much heroism came to light in these guerilla fights—

so much so that those who took part in them were not at all amused by talk in the rear of a "phoney war."

What I admired in these men of the advanced posts was not only their courage, but their kindness and ingenuousness. Their natural shyness covered a wealth of comradeship and considerateness. I remember one evening hearing a sergeant whispering to a corporal, "Go and take some cigarettes to X—— We must try to buck him up a bit. He's not used to this sort of thing, and he gets the wind up when he's on sentry duty at night." And the same evening, in a machine-gun post, I noticed how carefully the man on duty drew the blankets over a sleeping comrade who was awaiting his turn for duty.

There is much to be said too of the men of the motorised cavalry, of those tank regiments who showed their mettle in the forest of Warndt, and whom everyone regarded as tough and first-rate soldiers. And there were the airmen, who did not have to wait for the German offensive to show their heroism. They did what they could to kill the stupid legends of 1918, the stories of the knights of the air who lived a hero's life by day and painted the towns red by night. The French airmen were always brave and sometimes reckless, but they were also serious, thoughtful, modest, cultured men, well versed in all the complicated technique of their job.

### The Old Hands.

As I went farther from the front I sometimes found the morale less good. There, everything depended on the higher officers. The important thing was never to leave the men inactive. In this effort to keep them busy, miracles were performed by General Bourret of the fifth army (army of Alsace). All the men behind the Maginot Line had work of some kind. There was no other army with so many of its men at work on the land, where they were kept in close contact with the peasants of Alsace. The morale of the troops working on fortifications behind the lines was in general excellent. During the winter, when the cold was so intense that the frozen wine burst the

barrels and the frost snapped the handles of their spades, I saw men from the North of France working uncomplainingly and with an enthusiasm of which their leaders were proud, at the construction of *casemates* for the line along the Belgian frontier.

At the beginning of the war, it even happened that some of the older, second-reserve men were employed as woodsmen in front of the Maginot Line, and one could often see them clearing forest land in the neighbourhood of Sarreguemines, where they had themselves fought twenty-five years earlier. Wherever we went, the war of 1914 was brought back to our minds. Near Verdun, officers found themselves living once more in villages that had been their quarters during the last war. Some of the artillerymen dug the emplacements of their battery with German spades, recovered from an enormous hole that had once sheltered a Big Bertha. Elsewhere, in an army saw-mill in Lorraine, the saw often jarred against a bullet or a shell splinter, deeply embedded in the trunk of a poplar. The new war was arising from the still warm ashes of the old one, and if we are to be fair, this fact must remain always in our minds.

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### After May 10th. Memories of Rethel.

All that I have written so far deals with the months that preceded the offensive of May 10th. It may be argued in reply that there was in fact a considerable failure of morale during May and June, especially in the ninth army, the army of General Corap. I have no desire to deny any of this. But this weakening—the kind to which even the best armies have throughout history been liable—had disastrous consequences only because of incompetent leadership. One might even add that it was the incompetence of the leaders that was itself largely responsible for the failure of morale. For there is one certain and uncontradictable fact, namely, that wherever the men found leaders worthy

of the name, they proved themselves in no way inferior to their predecessors of 1914.

It is by way of proof and illustration of this claim that I propose to reproduce from my notes what I learned at Rethel. The battle that took place there provides the best evidence of the truth of what I have said. The account given here may perhaps seem disproportionately long. Since, however, I was one of the few correspondents who were able to learn the details of this important battle, I cannot allow this heroic page of history to be forgotten. The fact, moreover, that the circumstances of this battle themselves throw some light on the defeat of the ninth army on the Meuse on May 14th makes it all the more evidently my duty to tell the story.

If I am almost the only one to know in detail what happened at Rethel, my knowledge is in no way miraculous. During the last few weeks of the fighting in France the task of war correspondents became increasingly difficult. The missions allotted to them were a matter of pure chance. They were sent in groups to the G.H.Q. of one of the armies, whence they were distributed among the divisions. That is how chance, the patron saint of the journalist, sent me to Rethel on May 31st, when General de Lattre de Tassigny was completing the fortifications of his position on the southern bank of the Meuse. It was there that I heard from the lips of those who took part in them the story of the events I am about to describe.

## The Ninth Army and the Crossing of the Meuse Bridges.

If the story is to be made intelligible to the reader, certain preliminary explanations are necessary. It must be remembered first of all that the ninth army, under the command, when the German offensive began, of General Corap, had its G.H.Q. at Vervins, in the Aisne Department. On the left of the ninth army was the first army, under the command of General Blanchard, its right in positions in the region of St. Quentin and its left forming the junction with

the B.E.F. On the right of the ninth army was the second army, commanded by General Huntziger; this army had its left to the east of Sedan and its right in junction with General Condé's army of Lorraine, beyond Longwy.

It followed, therefore, that to the army of General Corap fell the whole of the defence of the Meuse and the Semois, facing the Belgian frontier, and of the towns of Mézières-Charleville, Rocroy, Givet and Sedan. It was through the collapse of the ninth army that the break through on the French front became possible. And the principal reason for this collapse, as was shown by M. Paul Reynaud at the tribune of the Senate, was that the Meuse bridges were not blown up. Many suggested explanations of the failure to blow them up have been put forward. Some have seen in it the work of the fifth column. I am not in a position to decide, but I note in passing that among the officers whom I met at Rethel, some believed that the fifth column had not remained inactive. They thought, for instance, that Germans disguised as French officers might in some places have given French troops orders to retreat. I am, however, more inclined to think that where bridges were not blown up, the explanation is that the officers responsible were too late in taking their decisions. They had not the courage to put a stop quickly enough to the flood of Belgian refugees pouring into France and choking the banks of the river.

However that may be, the fact that the Meuse bridges were not blown up appears to have exercised a decisive influence on the development of the battle. I had occasion to visit the Franco-Belgian frontier along the Meuse in the month of January; in military circles, the view then held was that the Meuse, flowing through a valley whose sides form cliffs of extraordinary steepness, could not be crossed. It must be admitted that in the weeks that followed the break-through the Germans showed great ingenuity, and that by sacrificing their men in waves they crossed many difficult rivers. I do not claim that they would not have succeeded in throwing bridges across the Meuse; they could, however, have done so only with great difficulty and very slowly. As it was, the element of surprise in the attack

across the Meuse seems to explain the disordered flight of the ninth army. The bridges not having been blown up, the German columns appeared suddenly before our troops, who must have been all the less prepared since they had been led to regard the Meuse as impassable. Had it not been for the disorder and confusion which resulted from this surprise attack, had some of the officers not been seized by panic, it would no doubt have been possible for the troops to retire to their second line and hang on there. I had been shown in January a whole district of ponds and marshes, which, I was told, lent itself admirably to defence. I was also shown the work recently done there; concrete pill-boxes capable of holding the enemy under their cross-fire, tank traps whose disposition was considered particularly praiseworthy.

It is true that I have since been told that these fortifications were inadequate. It is even stated by some people that General Corap repeatedly and insistently pointed out to the General Staff during the winter the need for new ones.[1] It is in any case the opinion of specialists that the fortifications had been built too far from the river—about a kilometre away. Above all, it is said that the troops of General Corap were insufficiently trained and hardened. It may be said in passing that I have no belief in the Communist plot, of which whispered stories were spread in the ante-rooms of Ministries and the corridors of the Chamber. To all those whom I met at Rethel, the idea of a Communist plot seemed quite simply fantastic.

When once the Meuse had been crossed, the motorised, columns, followed by the main body of German troops, were to move towards the north-west. The rest is known. . . . The defection of the army of Corap, then, exercised a decisive influence on the rest of the operations, on the defeats in the Nord Department and on the Somme. On the right of the ninth army there was, as we have said, the second army, that of Huntziger, with its own left wing

[1] I have recently been informed that the extreme-Right Deputy, Taittinger, had pointed out in a report made in March, 1940, to the Army Commission of the Chamber that the defences at this point were inadequate and lacking in particular in anti-tank guns.

facing the Belgian province of Luxembourg.[1] There too the impact of the German army was violent and there too there was, it would appear, a moment of weakening, a weakening which, however, had no effect on the operations that followed, since General Huntziger was able to check it. The orders of the day which he issued on this occasion and which were reproduced at the time in the Press are evidence both of his intelligence and of his firmness. It has been said, moreover, that General Huntziger had a motorised division at his disposal, and did not hesitate to go out himself in a tank, to set an example to his men.

RETHEL.

The breach opened by the collapse of the army of Corap might in fact have opened the way to a disaster even greater than that which actually occurred. The Germans hoped to cross the Aisne at Rethel as early as May 15th and from there, probably, to move fanwise towards the Marne and the Oise. This calls for somewhat more detailed explanation.

Rethel is situated about forty kilometres south of Mézières–Charleville, on both banks of the Aisne. In French military terminology, *Rethel pince trois rocades*, that is to say, it commands three strategic roads, one running north to Mézières, one south to Rheims and the Marne, and one west towards the Aisne Department and towards the Oise. As will be seen below, while the greater part of the German army moved north-west after passing through the Sedan gap, one part, coming from the region of Charleville, moved south and sought to cross the Aisne at Rethel. It was the division commanded by General de Lattre de Tassigny which prevented the realisation of this plan. Thanks to these troops, we kept control of the Aisne and of the communications to south and west. The General made a stand first of all on the north bank, in order to allow the

[1] It must be remembered that the Maginot Line came to an end a little to the north-west of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and therefore did not cover the Belgian province of Luxembourg.

fleeing ninth army to cross the river. When it became useless to hold the north bank any longer, he crossed to the other side, blew up the bridges and remained firmly fixed there until the dark days of June, when the general situation made the abandonment of the Aisne position necessary.

The story of General de Lattre reminds one of Foch, walking up and down in front of the map, placing his finger firmly on one spot and growling, " I shall stop them there ! " Or one thinks of the surgeon who instantly stops a hæmorrhage with his thumb.

What is the strategic importance of the battle of Rethel ? I have no intention of attempting a definite answer to this question. What would the German troops have done if they had crossed the Aisne on May 15th or 16th ? Would they have succeeded in pushing motorised columns southwards beyond the Marne, towards the Paris region ? Or would they have pushed westwards and reached the Paris basin by way of the valley of the Oise ? I remember a conversation I had on May 17th with a French Cabinet Minister : he told me that on the morning of the previous day General Gamelin had feared that the German columns might reach Paris the same evening, and it is indeed certain that the ease with which the Germans had advanced to the Aisne made all kinds of fears legitimate : the arrival of motorised columns in the Paris region was not inherently improbable. It seems, however, that at this time the German General Staff was not paying much attention to Paris, but thought only of the execution of the Schlieffen plan. The essential in their view was the thrust to the sea, followed by a march on the Seine. If the Nazis had taken Rethel, it is probable that a large portion of the troops taking part in this operation would have advanced westwards in the direction of the Oise and the Somme, in order ultimately to support the mass of their army in the Departments of the Nord, Pas-de-Calais and Somme.

The strategic importance of the battle of Rethel, then, cannot be determined, and I, at least, make no claim to do so. My hope is that this episode will help to prove that an army is as good as its leaders, and that if we had had more generals like de Lattre de Tassigny, France would still be fighting.

It was on May 31st that I was taken to Rethel. By this time General de Lattre was already installed on the south bank of the Aisne. In the days which followed his voluntary abandonment of the north bank and the destruction of the bridges he had established himself a little behind the south bank, in the outskirts of the town, on the bank of a canal. Gradually the part of the town between the canal and the river bank had been mopped up, until he was firmly installed on the south bank of the river itself. The position was a strong one. The enemy would have had to give up hope of driving us out, if there had not occurred elsewhere the sad events which remain for ever in our memories.

I went to see the General at his headquarters a few kilometres from the town. His aide-de-camp, Captain Laurent, explained for my benefit the phases of the battle so far. He told me how, when he arrived on May 14th, he had found the army in headlong flight, and gave me many interesting details of operations at Rethel. But the whole thing was put in a much clearer light, it became more vivid in my imagination, during a lunch at which I was the guest of the General.

## General de Lattre de Tassigny

De Lattre de Tassigny was well known to war correspondents. Throughout the winter he had been Chief of Staff to General Bourret, commander of the army of Alsace, the fifth army. This was perhaps the army which had been most active in every sphere, its men constantly kept up to scratch by the hard fighting of the advanced posts between Bitsche and Wissembourg. General Bourret had found in Colonel de Lattre a chief of staff whose most marked qualities were charm and energy. De Lattre had a striking face. I can still see it as I saw it at our last meeting near Rethel. A tall man, with well-marked features, he was clean-shaven, with a firm upper lip, his eyes of a peculiar grey, almost green, free in movement and with an attractive voice. The dominant impression is indeed one of a striking blend of charm and energy. One felt that

here was a leader capable of inspiring confidence, as in fact he did, in his men.

Towards the end of the winter Colonel de Lattre had been promoted to the command of a brigade. In Lorraine, he had had command of the fourteenth, a division which had not remained idle, but had taken its share of outpost fighting. This fourteenth division was resting near Lunéville when the offensive began, and was sent as a reinforcement to General Corap on Mary 14th.

"You are in a hurry," General de Lattre said to me. "All right, we'll find time to explain things. Captain Laurent has already begun, but it is essential that you know something of the reports of Major Jahan and Lieutenant Robert. We'll have lunch, and you shall see the reports afterwards." "But," I replied, "I should like to go into Rethel, see the officers and question the men." "Of course," said de Lattre. "Very well, then, we'll read you the reports during lunch."

And, indeed, during lunch, which the General took with all his Staff officers, the youngest of the second lieutenants, a fair-haired boy with child-like blue eyes, read us the report. From time to time the General interrupted with an explanation. The officers were much amused by the whole proceeding, which reminded one of those monasteries where the novices read aloud from the lives of saints during meal-times.

This time, however, it was the lives not of saints, but of heroes. And what heroes! In the afternoon I went to see some of them. To reach them we had to make a whole series of detours. The roads leading into Rethel were commanded by the guns of the enemy, and we had to take small side roads to avoid bombardment. In a house which served as headquarters I was received by Major Jahan, a reserve officer, I believe, a man of ready and subtle intelligence and with a certain air of distinction, delightfully courteous, but none the less frank and straightforward. He introduced me to the chief actors in the drama, Lieutenant Puget, Captain Quinche, an enormous square shouldered man, with a forehead suggesting obstinacy, and an attractive smile, a ranker officer and a strong man in

the fullest sense of the term. Champagne was brought in; these lads insisted on our having a drink together. Was I not, after all, the first journalist to visit them, the first to want to pass on to the public the story of their exploits? And, despite all their modesty, they knew perfectly well that their deeds and those of their men were not of the kind that can be left in oblivion.

What a glorious day it was! Even now I cannot think of it without a heavy heart. All the officers were so cheerfully confident; so confident, too, the soldiers with whom I chatted in the course of the day. For all of us, at that time, victory was still a certainty. The collapse of the ninth army seemed no more than an unfortunate accident, whose consequences were not irreparable. Better times would soon come, and the whole army would resist as the fourteenth division had resisted. . . .

Alas! . . .

### The Breach at Sedan.

Here then is the story as I heard it from many people during that day's visit on May 31st.

The advance elements of the 14th arrived on May 14th from the direction of Rheims. General de Lattre went immediately to the G.H.Q. of General Corap at Vervins. He found the commander of the ninth army anxious, but by no means distraught. General Corap told him that the Germans had broken through at Sedan, but that Mézières was still holding. He believed that the second army, that of General Huntziger, had given way; he did not yet know that his own was in full retreat. So he asked General de Lattre to go to the junction of the ninth and second armies, and told him that on the extreme right was the 53rd division, together with which he, de Lattre, was to set up a defensive flank, so as to re-establish liaison between the ninth and second armies. General de Lattre obeyed immediately, but in what conditions! The troops coming from Lunéville had scarcely disembarked and he had at that time at his disposal only a quarter of his effectives. It should be added

that the journey had been difficult: ten men had been killed in a bomb attack.

Nevertheless, de Lattre advanced—just in time to witness the rout of the ninth army. I have no desire to insist on some of the scenes described to me. The best armies have given way at some time to panic, and I have already explained how the unexpected arrival of the Germans had led to disorganised flight. It is perhaps sufficient to say here that some officers undoubtedly failed to keep their heads. Anyone with the most elementary knowledge of the psychology of the soldier, and in general of mob psychology, knows perfectly well that leaders capable of controlling their own nerves can easily dominate their men, however badly the latter may have caught the contagion of flight. Now it cannot be contested that some of the officers of the ninth army failed to control their own nerves. To say less than that would be to do a disservice to truth. But I hasten to add that there were nevertheless, amid all this lamentable disorder, many examples of quiet courage, even of heroism, such as that of the Colonel who seized the regimental colours, took up position with thirty men, and was killed with them.

But to return to General de Lattre, who, in accordance with the orders he had received, set out in search of the 53rd division. Vain search! The 53rd had disappeared; everything had disappeared, the ninth army was without a right wing. All that was left was a breach through which the soldiers of Hitler were passing—and at what a speed!

"You will occupy the second line, then," said General Corap, and again de Lattre obeyed. He tried to fall back on the reserve positions and to occupy a line forty kilometres long with no more than a skeleton of the necessary forces; a strange task indeed!

The first to arrive were a battalion of the 152nd infantry regiment, followed soon after by a second battalion of the same regiment. This 152nd regiment earned fame in the last war; it is the regiment stationed in peace time at Colmar, and known as the "red devils" because it had been given the right to wear the red lanyard of the Legion of Honour. It was to play a great part in the battle of

Rethel. To the two battalions of the 152nd were added various other units, some already on the spot, having escaped the prevalent panic. These included some Spahis, and part of a light cavalry division.

But when the troops reached the second line, the German tanks were already there. . . .

This was on the 14th of May, towards the end of the day. In the evening, the officers of de Lattre's division learned of the arrival of another army, under the command of General Touchon, to whom had been entrusted the task of "co-ordination." It was, presumably, at this moment that the command of the whole sector passed from the hands of General Corap to those of General Giraud, who was soon to be taken prisoner.

### The Battle of Rethel.

On the 15th the battle began. German tanks advanced north of the Aisne, and attempts had to be made to stop them by improvised methods. The task was a difficult one, since there were thirty or forty tanks facing each locality. The Nazis operate in highly methodical fashion. The tanks are preceded by motor-cyclists. The leading elements open fire immediately, so as to draw the fire of the anti-tank weapons. The heavy tanks follow behind. In liaison with motorised units, aeroplanes, usually Henschells; fly slowly at about 150 feet, almost skimming the ground.

The infantry held its ground as best it could. In the afternoon it destroyed about thirty tanks with its small ·25 guns. Two of the "red devils'" guns alone destroyed at least eight, perhaps even twelve tanks. With the spirit of adaptation which is the greatest quality of the French soldier, our men had already begun to accustom themselves to the new tactics. They observed that tanks in retreat are not touched by projectiles fired from a long range, but must be attacked with open sights. They noted also that the German armour-plating is vulnerable to the fire of some of the French guns, notably the 47's. And if

we leave questions of technique to turn to the courage of the troops, there also is much to be said. One village was set on fire by the Germans, who arrived soon after with tanks; our small guns fired at a range of thirty yards, and all the tanks were destroyed.

Thus our soldiers, chiefly the 152nd, resisted foot by foot. General Touchon confirmed the instructions of General Corap; the 14th division was to try to organise a defensive position. Major Jahan, of the 152nd, first tried to do so near the village of Omont, about twenty kilometres north-west of Rethel. He tried to fix two battalions of the 152nd like two mooring-buoys, *comme deux bouées de môle*—the nautical expression is his own, and is taken from his report.

Towards nine o'clock in the evening General de Lattre met in Rethel the liaison officer of a tank battalion belonging to some unspecified division. This officer, left in charge of three tanks which had broken down, wanted to know when the bridges would be blown up, since he hoped to transport his tanks to the south bank of the Aisne as soon as possible.

"The bridges will not be blown up," said the General, "and I am keeping the tanks."

These tanks performed miracles, their exploits seem to belong to the realm of legend. Here is one brief anecdote about them. A major in one tank and a battalion adjutant in another noticed sixteen German tanks at rest in a cutting, three quarters of a mile away. The two officers separated; one of them (I do not know the name of the major, but the adjutant was called, I think, Malaperti) going to the head of the German column, where he destroyed two tanks; the other went to the rear and also destroyed two. The remaining twelve were knocked out, in the words of Captain Laurent, who described the incident to me, "like puppets in a show."

But it was impossible to resist successfully in this position. The German pressure was becoming more intense. An armoured division was harrying our troops. So it was

decided to retreat to the Aisne, and the celebrated bridge-head on the north bank was established. In this way, the retreating troops of the Corap army were able to cross to the south bank and were thus saved. For four days, the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th, and up to the morning of the 20th, de Lattre's 14th division held on, despite furious attacks; four days and five nights of battle, comparable with the most glorious episodes of the Great War. Resistance was continued for as long as was necessary, and it was only when all the fugitives had crossed and the written order to withdraw had been given that the troops abandoned the north bank in good order, blew up the bridges, and installed themselves on the south bank in the circumstances described above.

Towards the evening of the 15th, a cavalry reconnaissance unit had occupied the position, and held it with exemplary bravery. One instance of this must suffice. Captain Gérat, of the reconnaissance unit, boldly placed his ·25 gun between a German tank and a German column, in order the better to get at the enemy. But it was on the morning of the 16th that Major Jahan took up position with his units of the 152nd, and that there began the operations on a large scale in which Captain Quinche, of the 11th Company, and Lieut. Puget, of the ninth, were particularly to distinguish themselves.

It must, unfortunately, be added that these results were not obtained without loss. The 152nd lost half its officers and 1,000 N.C.O.'s and men, 40 per cent. of its strength in all. Major Jahan took risks with the greatest valour, and his car was nearly destroyed by a shell. To appreciate to the full the value of the work done, it must be remembered that the troops of the division were still arriving only slowly, so that a line of twenty-eight kilometres had to be held by two thirds of a division.

THE TANKS.

One piece of luck was the acquisition of a few tanks, whose crews had brought them on their own initiative to

General de Lattre. Among the officers who, I was told, spontaneously offered their services, was a Catholic seminarist. On the 17th the division had five tanks. It is true that only four were fully utilisable, one of the three recovered on the 15th having very soon been immobilised, but these four, under the command of Lieut. Robert, performed wonders. One of them, picking out a heavy tank, attacked with its 75. There were incessant fights with the German motorised elements. The Nazis showed great tenacity and neglected no ruse known to warfare.

One evening, Captain Quinche saw that Lieut. Robert's tank was in danger. "Come back, Robert," he called out. Robert did not hear, but a German officer heard for him and repeated the order, so as to draw him in his direction. Quinche simply went out himself to fetch Robert back. On another occasion, the Lunéville, one of the tanks, was resisting infantry infiltrations. The corporal in command of the tank noticed machine-gun fire coming from the edge of a wood, near a group of cows. He opened fire, and found a German soldier behind each cow. He then, in the words of Lieut. Robert's report, "settled the matter with his machine-gun." It was the same corporal who was attacked next morning by heavy tanks. He opened fire at point-blank range and destroyed five tanks and four machine-gun carriers. Then, as he withdrew, he destroyed an anti-tank gun, four armoured cars and a motorcycle. It is to the same tank unit that must be attributed the capture of a German Lieutenant-Colonel commanding an A.A. unit, in whose possession were found important papers regarding the push to the sea.

Yet it is with this charmingly modest phrase that Robert ends his report: "The greatest credit must go to the infantry for the courage they showed in exploiting the results produced by the tanks." This is, indeed, too great humility, but it is not for us to determine the order of merit. One thing is certain: when Robert speaks of the courage of the infantry, he is perfectly right. The 152nd cannot be too highly praised, especially for its part in the extraordinary battle of the cemeteries, with which I propose to end this narrative. For it was between two cemeteries, the

French civil cemetery and a German military one (probably dating from 1870) that a decisive battle was fought on the evening of May 17th.

THE BATTLE OF THE CEMETERIES.

It was nearly half-past nine. In the distance, a church steeple could be seen in flames. The Germans were observed spreading through the surrounding orchards. Then there came into view a number of compact and confused columns. As they drew nearer, an incredible sight was revealed; they consisted of German infantrymen advancing literally arm in arm, in serried ranks. Prolonged yells filled the air. This mass of humanity was advancing without firing, with complete contempt for danger and death. " Surrender! ", " Hands up! " they called, and again " Heil Hitler! ", " You are beaten! ", " 'Raus Schweine! " This mass continued to advance and their yells grew louder in the eerie night, illuminated by the burning buildings.

" They seemed," wrote Major Jahan, " like men maddened with drink." The Nazis were seeking to demoralise the French troops by this fantastic apparition, and the whole spectacle seemed to exemplify the Hitlerian system of intimidation. The reply from our side was a heavy fire, and there followed a general mêlée between the two cemeteries. At one time, the Germans nearly succeeded in capturing the civil cemetery, and were held back only by heavy machine-gun fire. Finally they gave up the attempt, and by morning we remained masters of the cemeteries, while the enemy left his dead on the field.

On the 18th and 19th the battle continued night and day. On the 19th it reached its most furious point. In the afternoon the fires started by the battle reached Rethel, and by evening everything was in flames. A breach had been made in the wall separating the two cemeteries. An intense bombardment was followed by the Germans using their shock troops. Our men were using automatic weapons, and French soldiers were seen to stand upright to get a better sight. At last the Germans withdrew, and we

continued to hold the cemeteries until the order to withdraw was given.

In the course of this battle numberless deeds of heroism were performed. Officers and men were in permanent contact with the enemy. On the 19th Captain Quinche returned to our lines astride the 75 of a tank. There are many other stories one could tell: of the infantryman who destroyed nearly half a dozen tanks with his 25 before being himself shot down; of the sergeant taken prisoner, who killed his two guards and climbed back over the barbed wire to rejoin his post; of the soldier who shammed death among the German tanks and had the courage to keep watch without breathing a word or risking a movement while a small tank passed so close that it cut the strap of his gas-mask container. There is, too, the story of the M.O. who stayed behind in a church where he had been caring for the wounded. Suddenly he saw men coming towards him, and took them at first for men of the reconnaissance unit. Then he saw that they were Germans. He calmly went off through the orchards, found two Spahis and took them back through the German lines, crossing a stream on the way. Lastly, here are a few figures. They are the most eloquent part of the story. Around Rethel, the Germans lost a minimum of 200 to 250 motor vehicles, of which from twenty to thirty were tanks or machine-gun carriers.

Such was the battle of Rethel. It will be admitted that it deserved to be saved from oblivion. Sometimes I dream that in a France that has recovered her freedom, in the Republic one and indivisible that the victory of the democracies will rebuild, children will learn the story of these fights and the names of their heroes. When that time comes, we shall no longer even think of the tired old man who set out to make us forget the victor of Verdun. As for the General to whom fell the high command of the French armies during the last days of the June fighting, history will already have put him in his true place, between the Connétable de Bourbon and Marshal Bazaine.

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Other Examples.

This too long account makes any further demonstration unnecessary. It is, however, perhaps permissible to offer a few more examples chosen at random. First is the case of General de Gaulle, who, with his mechanised troops, justified his theories and obtained brilliant results. On May 16th and 18th, in particularly difficult conditions, he launched attacks in the neighbourhood of Laon and met with great success. On May 30th and 31st he attacked the enemy bridgehead to the south of Abbeville with his mechanised division, broke the German resistance, advanced fifteen kilometres into their lines and captured several hundred prisoners and much material.

Here is a further example. On Sunday, June 9th, I was in the fighting zone for the last time. On a visit to the G.H.Q. of the sixth army, near Montmirail, in the Marne Department, I heard the story of the battle of the Aillette, to the north of the Aisne. The Germans had attacked with forces three times as great as ours. They proceeded by the method of infiltration, using bombardments by dive-bombers, seeking to demoralise by perpetually circling planes. But they encountered an unexpected resistance. Our men held the Aillette line for two days ; on the 7th the Aisne was still holding, but on the 8th the Nazis succeeded in crossing to the east of Soissons. They suffered severe losses in this attempt, but as one wave was cut down another followed and then another. A few units succeeded in crossing the river, some by swimming. Yet our men resisted foot by foot. Everyone insisted to me that *the morale of the troops was extraordinarily good.* They spoke particularly well of General Lestien, whose *chasseurs alpins* I had already met in the advanced posts of the army of Alsace. His 28th division had just distinguished itself in the battle then in progress.

In the afternoon I was at Ouchy-le-Château, at the headquarters of a division. I saw men desperately tired after several sleepless nights. None complained. Their only thoughts were of resistance. In one village I talked with a

reservist, a "poilu" of the last war, now a lorry driver. He was a teacher from southern France. He did not hide his alarm at the German advance, but he said, in his rich meridional accent, "We old 'uns will soon have to have a go at them." In the evening I passed through some of the villages near Château Thierry, in the Aisne Department. People were shutting up their houses and leaving hurriedly, and the sight of refugees driven out by the enemy for the second time in twenty years was indeed a painful one. But nobody, I am sure, thought of capitulation. Defences were being prepared along the Marne. All the soldiers thought we were about to launch the decisive battle which should save Paris.

And there were the soldiers whom I met three days later at a railway station near Orléans. They were on their way back from Dunkirk and were moving towards the Seine. They thought they were just going to fight again. They were singing. Or there is the story of Tours. It was after the request for an armistice. The Prefect, the Bishop and the Mayor, the latter an old Socialist worker, Ferdinand Morin, went to see the General to beg him to resist. They held the Germans for five days. Lastly, the newspapers have told us that a week after the signature of the Armistice some of the troops in the Maginot Line were still resisting, and a French General had to make a special journey to compel them to cease fire.

But why should I go on? The case is surely clear, and it is time to pass from defence to accusation.

## 2. THE BLUNDERS OF THE GENERAL STAFF

### General Gamelin.

It is not by accident that in this chapter heading I speak of the General Staff and not only of General Gamelin. It is too easy for the men of Vichy to find in him a scapegoat, but in fact the mistakes of the General Staff go further back than Gamelin's time. His predecessors, whether their

name be Pétain or Weygand, inspired or shared the mistaken ideas which led us to defeat.

I never had an opportunity to meet General Gamelin. My judgments on him are therefore in no way affected by those physical prejudices which so often, for good or ill, influence even those journalists who are most anxious to be objective. But all the views I have heard about the former Commander-in-Chief are in almost complete agreement. Nobody denies General Gamelin's intelligence. He undoubtedly possesses the gift of clarity of thought, and he must have that ability in exposition and argument which charms Parliamentary Commissions. He is, moreover, a Republican officer, loyal to the régime. But his character is not equal to his intelligence. He is clever; too clever. "A good Prefect," a Minister once said to me, one of the Ministers who, like Gamelin, is to appear before the Court of Justice at Riom, "but not a Commander-in-Chief." And a high Civil Servant, who often met him on inter-ministerial committees, was astonished, not by his eloquence, but by his silences. Like a prudent official, he spoke very little. He seemed more like a Quartermaster-General than the head of the French Army. According to some of those who have met him, he has been heard to make remarks which suggested that he had more belief in a diplomatic than in a military victory. But these are only remarks that have passed from mouth to mouth and may well have been deformed. It must not be forgotten that Gamelin was opposed to the Munich settlement, and that his reports of September, 1938 ought to have encouraged Daladier and Bonnet to be firmer.

When Gamelin was dismissed, I thought his degradation a deserved one. As time passes, I am inclined to change my view. Gamelin is weak, lacking in character, too easily influenced, no doubt, by his Staff, but his elasticity of mind might have been useful: he might perhaps have understood the need for a change of tactics. He intends, it is said, to prove that he had a plan for a counter-offensive, a plan which his successor abandoned. Why, after all, should he not have been given the opportunity to rehabilitate himself? His teacher, Joffre, was the Commander-in-Chief

at Charleroi and Morhange, as well as on the Marne. In any case, it was a great mistake to replace him by Weygand, whose fault was not simply incompetence.

This correction should none the less not prevent us from judging Gamelin severely. Pétain and Weygand have no right to do so, but the right does belong to every free citizen of France and Great Britain. And since the Commander-in-Chief supported his Staff, since he defended the indolent theories of his so-called strategists and induced Daladier—always too easily persuaded by Gamelin—to adopt them, he deserves to be classed along with the General Staff and to receive the condemnation of public opinion, the only one that counts—for that of Riom belongs rather to the realm of tragi-comedy.

## The Maginot Line.

When one speaks of the mistakes of the General Staff, one's thoughts naturally go to the Maginot Line, and there has been a tendency, since the capitulation of France, to too hasty judgments on this point. If we are to believe some military commentators, the very idea of the Maginot Line was almost ridiculous. Yet one can never be sure that the journalist who commits himself to overstatements of this kind is not one of those who a few months ago regarded the ferro-concrete fortresses of the Line as impregnable. It is time the problem was considered with a little more moderation. Not being a technician, I shall make no attempt to pass final judgment on the principles that led to the construction of the Maginot Line, though it is perhaps worth while saying in passing that those principles originated in the mind, not of Maginot, but of Paul Painlevé, and that the former merely carried out the ideas of the great mathematician who had preceded him at the Ministry of War. In any case, the material for a final judgment is lacking, since the Line was never broken, but turned. For, despite the views of certain other writers, I cannot accept as they do the German communiqué of the month of June, which announced the breaking of the Line at its western extremity, near Montmédy. A breach then was no more than an

accident of the last few days, when everything was collapsing. One fact at least is worth noting; when the Germans had crossed the Meuse bridges, they turned north-west, passing *behind* the northern frontier fortifications. I know that in the opinion of General de Gaulle there is no such thing as an impregnable fortress, and that the Germans might have broken the Line if they had been prepared to pay the price. This may well be true. But there is no doubt that the task would have required not only heavy sacrifices, but a considerable time. And behind the point where the break-through occurred the enemy would have encountered defences in depth, which were on the whole perhaps as effective as the ferro-concrete masses of the Line itself. It is not enough to reply to this by pointing out that the second lines on the Meuse were of little use. The story that was told to me at Rethel and which has been reproduced above shows, I think, the extent of the panic that seized the ninth army; and no system of fortifications can properly be judged if the men whose task is to hold it are unable to resist panic. I speak as a layman, but as a layman who had been allowed to see the whole of our defensive dispositions from Switzerland to the North Sea; it is therefore perhaps permissible for me to say that our second line defences and in a general way the fortifications built after September, 1939, seemed to be competently planned and to be modelled on the Siegfried Line, without becoming a servile copy of it.

I remember visiting some very ingenious little fortifications along the Luxembourg frontier. The frontier was protected by the Maginot Line, but between the Line and the Grand Duchy there are a number of small industrial towns. The region is hilly and broken up by the mines that pass under the frontier. The technicians of the second army (Huntziger's Army) had turned all this to full advantage. Every contour, every depression had been used. Everywhere there were casemates, machine-gun posts, trenches, barbed-wire, camouflaged guns; every copse bristled with defences.

To-day I may perhaps risk a confession which I would not have made a few months ago, when I still had con-

fidence in the competence of our General Staff. It had always seemed to me that the biggest of the Maginot forts, the ones that were compared, sometimes with a ship and sometimes with an underground city, did not possess a fire power proportionate to the tons of concrete used in their construction. One passed in electric trains through kilometres of passages, one went by electric lift from one floor to another, one was shown the fire-control rooms . . . and when, at the very end of the visit, one went up to the cupolas, to be shown how the fire of the guns and machine-guns crossed with that from another fort similarly arranged, it was difficult to avoid the thought that millions of francs and tons of cement had been sunk into the ground with relatively little to show for it in the way of artillery.

OUR SIEGFRIED LINE.

It is for this reason that I have never echoed the parrot-phrase so frequently heard during the last few months, namely, "Why was the Maginot Line not continued to the North Sea?" Let me make myself clear. I have no desire to defend the General Staff, which had left the Belgian frontier imperfectly defended. That was sheer lunacy. One might even add that if our brilliant strategists had paid to German military writings the attention they deserve, they would have taken some notice of the Schlieffen Plan. And as this plan proposed an advance along the valley of the Seine, they ought to have fortified not only the Belgian frontier, but the Somme and the Seine as well. But it was none the less a great mistake to claim, as some writers too lightly do, that the Belgian frontier was not defended, or that the works carried out after the beginning of the war were of no value. Honesty compels one to admit that from September onwards the Staffs of the Armies concerned did what they could to make up for lost time.

Let us admit, since the "experts" seem to be in agreement on the point, that the fortifications built by the ninth army were inadequate. It is still not impossible to imagine that a line could have been held behind the Meuse, had it not been for the panic which followed the crossing of the bridges. And I can affirm without fear of contradiction

that not only General Blanchard's first army, on the left of the ninth and covering the regions of Fourmies, Avesnes, the Cambrésis, Hainaut, Maubeuge, Valenciennes, but also General Giraud's seventh army, on the extreme left of our positions, between St. Omer and the sea, both worked miracles during those eight months. According to what I have heard from my colleagues of the British Press, the B.E.F., whose centre, as is now generally known, was in Lille, and which filled the gap between the first and the seventh armies, worked no less actively.

I had occasion more than once to go to the Belgian frontier. There I was able to see how thoroughly the seventh army had fortified the widely differing regions of French Flanders, the little hills in the neighbourhood of Cassel, the dunes of Dunkirk, where properly supported trenches had been built in the sand, the low-lying *water-gands*, where nothing had been omitted in the preparations for immediate flooding.[1]

I came to know best the first army, where work went on incessantly. Some fortifications of the Maginot type were there before the war, but from September onwards tons of concrete had been poured into the earth. There were pill-boxes of the Siegfried type everywhere. In the middle of ploughed fields, even in the middle of streets there were camouflaged posts. Seemingly quiet little towns hid fearful instruments of destruction. Wherever one went one met trenches, tank traps, machine-gun nests, barbed-wire entanglements. Ingenuity had been carried to such a point that a use had been found, with suitable adaptations, for the fortifications of Vauban. In the old fortified town of Condé-sur-Escaut I was shown the flooding mechanism, and in the old fortress of Maulde I saw a modern superstructure built in to the old defences. Despite the severe winter, work had never ceased, and by the end of April a

[1] In the interests of accuracy it should perhaps be added that according to information received from a soldier of the seventh army whom I have since met in London, the work in the Yser sector was carried out too slowly between September, 1939, and January, 1940. This is however a minor detail which in no way affects the conclusions reached here.

coherent system of first, second and third line defences had been established.

It seems that this northern Seigfried Line was forced. This fact, however, proves no more than does the forcing of the Maginot Line at Montmédy. If the line was forced, it was at the end of May or the beginning of June, after the defection of Leopold, when the Germans were advancing from all directions. It is said, moreover, that in one place whose name I have forgotten, it was found that the casemates could not be used because they were locked! If this is true it tells us a great deal about the chaos of these last days.

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MAGINOT PSYCHOLOGY.

It is, then, unwise to condemn out of hand the whole idea of fortifications. That, surely, is the conclusion to be drawn from the arguments advanced here—arguments which, it must be remembered, are offered solely as a corrective of too categoric views. But even if one admits that the Maginot Line and the Siegfried type of fortification were not wholly useless, there is one point on which it ought to be possible for everyone to agree, namely, that *the Maginot Line had created a false impression of security, the dangerous illusion of the bloodless war.*

Gradually the illusion spread in France that the Maginot Line fulfilled all our needs and was alone sufficient to win the war for us. Safely buried beneath tons of concrete, one had only to " wait for it." All we needed was patience, and some providential happening would reward us. This view was not, of course, expressed in so simple a fashion, either in speech or writing, by the leading figures of the General Staff, but the months of inaction helped to strengthen its hold on the mind of the public, both civil and military. Public mentality became accustomed to what was so terribly miscalled the " phoney " war; or rather they became accustomed to the idea that the war would go on in the same way to the end. If the General Staff never publicly accepted this view, it sternly refused to take the offensive. As early

as October 15th the attack on the forest of Warndt was abandoned.

It will be remembered that at the beginning of the war our troops had taken the offensive and had advanced several kilometres, occupying the forest of Warndt. The operation was not a costly one, but it was not carried out without some casualties; our troops had found a difficult terrain and positions heavily mined. Then, to the astonishment of the public, which was in daily expectation of the capture of Saarbrücken, it was learned suddenly that the order to retreat had been given and that our army had returned to our own frontier. The official reason for this decision was that the offensive, having been undertaken in order to relieve the pressure on Poland, could properly be abandoned as pointless after the collapse of our ally

The truth is that the decision was taken only after a long discussion in the War Council. So many contradictory rumours have been current on the subject that it is difficult in the present state of affairs to know how it was taken and who were the generals who opposed it. It was said that General Georges, Commander-in-Chief of the French armies (Gamelin being in command of the allied armies), was in favour of continuing the operations. But the rumours spread by the friends of Georges, who was constantly intriguing against Gamelin, are, I am assured from a reliable source, totally unrelated to the facts. When all the facts are weighed there is only one General of whom it can be said with certainty that he favoured a continued offensive; this was General Buhrer, commander of the colonial troops and a close military coadjutor of Mandel.

It may be that the withdrawal was necessary, and that the state of our preparations made a continuation of the offensive undesirable. But it must be said that it was badly received by the men who had taken part in the fighting. Near Forbach, in November, I talked with young officers and men who did not conceal their disappointment at having to give up territory dearly bought, without being forced to do so. It must indeed be admitted that this rule of inactivity gave a strange character to the war. When one visited the casemates near the Kehl Bridge, just outside

Strasbourg, or similar pill-boxes along the Rhine, and saw trains running and factory chimneys smoking on the opposite bank, one's feelings were difficult to put into words.

But the strangest feelings of all were those I had in November at the headquarters of a divisional artillery in Lorraine. It was a tiny office in a very ordinary house in an abandoned village. Its walls were covered with maps. At the tables officers worked in silence. The commanding officer who received us was a tall, white-haired man, with rather immobile features. In retirement when the war broke out, he had been keen to return to the army. His passion was gunnery. Leaning over a map heavily streaked with pencil marks, he explained the positions of his batteries, marked by yellow, blue and green dots according to their calibre. He pointed out their emplacements and described their range. " These," he said, " are covering Saarbrücken ; one telephone call, and we can begin bombarding it immediately."

This remark haunted my memory for a long time, and I never failed to connect it with another memory from the same period. I had visited a tank formation, and had learned of the magnificent work done by our tanks in the forest of Warndt. I was assured that their armour was practically proof against German shells. It was satisfying to reflect that our material was in every way superior to the Germans'. At that time it was no doubt true. . . . But, during the eight months of inactivity that followed, Hitler had time to remedy the weaknesses his tanks had shown.

So much for the Warndt offensive. What it all comes to is that immobility on the western front gradually became a sort of dogma, just as atttack at any price—and without proper preparation—had been the dogma of the General Staff in 1914, which despised heavy artillery. It was, of course, an unstated dogma, never put into words, but everything that happened suggested that immobility was the rule, a very convenient rule for lazy minds, lacking in imagination and never fertile in ideas. One simple fact must be remembered. When, as spring approached, our English allies wanted to begin the bombardment of the

industrial centres of the Rhineland, they came up against the opposition of the General Staff, for whom Daladier was only the mouthpiece. Maginot psychology ruled out operations of this kind *for the time being*. There was nothing to do but *wait*. But while the man in the street was waiting vaguely for some miracle, the French generals knew perfectly well what *they* were waiting for. The act of providence presented itself to their minds with perfect clarity. They were waiting for a German offensive through Belgium. They waited with complete confidence, their plans all ready.[1] I was on the Belgian frontier in January, at the time when the expected attack on Belgium failed to materialise. Our people were rather disappointed when Hitler did not persist with his plans, but they all regarded it as no more than a postponement. And at the northern G.H.Q., where I was stationed when the offensive began, everyone was exultant. It will perhaps be remembered that General Gamelin's order of the day on this occasion spoke of the "expected" offensive.[2]

This, then, is the proof of the incompetence of our commanders. They had not the excuse of believing that they merely had to hold their positions; they knew that open fighting must come. They hoped and waited for a war of manœuvre. Why, then, during those eight months, had they not prepared for it? Indolence and routine, routine and indolence. These two words should be engraved in the minds of those who wish to understand our failures. They alone enable one to grasp the unforgivable mistakes of the General Staff. Experience taught them nothing; its lessons were turned aside by the armour-plate of their prejudices. They watched the progress of a revolution in military technique without even trying to understand its significance. They had seen the wars in Spain and Poland. In that same year they had watched the wars in Finland

[1] This plan, modified several times in the course of the winter, was known as Plan D.

[2] Here is the full text of Gamelin's order of the day on May 10th. *The attack expected since October last has been launched this morning. Germany is engaged in a life and death struggle with our country. For France and all her allies, the watchword is 'courage, energy, confidence.' Gamelin.*

and Norway. But the lessons of the Military College continued to triumph over those of experience.

MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE RÔLE OF THE AEROPLANE AND THE TANK.

Nevertheless, it needed no more than a little common sense to see the direction in which their thoughts should have moved. If a war of manœuvre was what they expected, there was no reason to behave as if the Germans would change their methods for the mere pleasure of showing how right the French tacticians and strategists were. We ought, then, while we were raising our production of aeroplanes and tanks to a maximum, to have done all we could to keep our soldiers in fighting trim. The men in the advanced posts should have been changed more frequently, so that the younger men were not kept for too long periods on the calmer parts of the front. Above all, we should have tried to accustom them to the sight and sound of modern warfare. Their training should have been carried out amid the din of heavy tanks and hedge-hopping bombers. It has been pointed out above, in the discussion of the battle for the Meuse bridges, that properly hardened soldiers would have behaved very differently.

The truth is that *the General Staff consistently refused to consider tanks and aeroplanes as anything but auxiliary weapons.* Nothing could shift it from this hoary attitude. In 1870 our strategists thought in terms of the campaigns of Napoleon. In 1914 their minds were still in 1870. In 1939–40 they were still obsessed by 1918. Their thoughts were always one war behind. One is irresistibly reminded of Clemenceau's remark, that " war is too serious a business to be left to the direction of soldiers."

That our General Staff neglected the air arm is, alas, a matter no longer in need of proof. It is no use trying to blame Parliament, which had voted all the credits asked of it, just as it did in 1914. Indeed, the heaviest sums were demanded by the Popular Front Governments, and they were voted unanimously by both Chamber and Senate. What was wrong was the allocation of the votes between the departments, so that the Air Ministry never got what it

needed. I am even less of a specialist in aviation than in military matters, and am in no way competent to criticise the manner in which the Air Ministry votes were spent. It does, however, appear that the Parliamentary Commissions should have shown greater competence and exercised a more careful check. But in the last resort policy was the function of the General Staff, of a General Staff that considered the air arm as an auxiliary weapon and never asked for sufficient sums for it.

At the risk of shocking those who have been too much influenced by a persistent campaign of vilification, I must insist that the Air Minister who understood best the rôle of the aeroplane in modern warfare was Pierre Cot. His mistake lay in not resigning ostentatiously in 1937. He had asked for the amounts needed for the Air Force, but Daladier, who was Minister of Defence as well as Minister of War, cut down the Air Force vote for the benefit of the Army. In this he was only acting in accordance with the views of the theorists of the General Staff; and not, moreover, of Gamelin only, but of all those who claim to judge him to-day. I admit that Pierre Cot should not have accepted the mutilation of his plans. He should have left the Government. But the fact remains that it was he who wanted to spend on the Air Force the sums we now know to have been necessary and the General Staff that prevented it. No insult and no slander can prevail against this fact, which, I imagine, will at some time be further demonstrated by Pierre Cot himself. I imagine that some day, too, he will give some details of the disdain with which high military circles looked upon the air arm whenever its status as an autonomous arm was in question. Is it, for instance, generally known that in 1937 the Air Ministry under Pierre Cot had created special aviation divisions, which were suppressed by the General Staff in 1939? Is it easy to believe the fact that a general was censured, shortly after Munich, for having prepared a plan of aerial defence which was not in accord with the views of the General Staff?

And what kind of welcome did the General Staff give to General de Gaulle? For years, the man who was to undertake after the capitulation to save the honour of the French

Army in the eyes of the world had issued his warnings in vain. He had been the first to understand modern war, the war of machines. He had foreseen that the rôle of the aeroplane and the tank was no longer an auxiliary, but a principal one. German soldiers attached great importance to his writings, but the French soldiers who grasped their importance were very few. To timid thinkers, incapable of any effort of intellectual rejuvenation, his original and inquiring mind seemed to be too much given to fantasy. De Gaulle was indeed regarded simply as a dreamer. And last spring, when Paul Reynaud wanted to make him secretary of the War Cabinet, he was met by implacable opposition from Daladier, acting once more as the mouthpiece of the General Staff. The friend of Reynaud who gave me this information added that Daladier had even threatened to resign.

It must, incidentally, be admitted that Paul Reynaud, who is the object of severe criticism in later chapters of this book, had the merit of being among the first to understand the ideas of de Gaulle. Alone among the politicians, he continued to advocate them in speech and writing.

Despite the reception of his views by our official strategists, de Gaulle continued throughout the war to issue his warnings. In January, 1940, he sent to the General Staff an illuminating report on "The Coming Mechanised Army." And, of course, no notice was taken of it. Indeed, the military censors even suppressed the articles of any journalist who was reckless enough to defend the ideas of this heretic. This is no exaggeration. In May, after the beginning of the offensive, this report came into my hands, and I wanted to publish extensive extracts from it in the *Europe Nouvelle*, for which, under the pen-name of "Charras," I was acting as war correspondent. I was allowed to reproduce only a few lines, well concealed by verbiage. I was, moreover, forbidden to mention the author's name, and was allowed only to describe him as "a well-known technician."

There is, fortunately, no reason why the English reader should not be permitted to learn of General de Gaulle's forecasts. It may, I think, serve a useful purpose if I reproduce here the essentials of the report of January 26th.

The reader can judge from the analysis given below of the extraordinary lucidity of judgment which inspired it. And at the same time it will illustrate the blindness of a General Staff which refused to accept so pointed a demonstration of the facts.

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THE DE GAULLE REPORT.

In the very first pages of the report, the General points out the strange character of the war, and especially the stagnation of the land forces on the Franco-German front. Already in 1914–18, he says, events led one to expect " this kind of impotence of mass methods." Later, " means which have appeared or been developed all tend to reduce capacity for manœuvre and attack." The French and the Germans have built concrete and armour-plated fortifications. " Finally, aeroplanes and armoured vehicles possess from now onwards so high a potential of surprise and destruction in comparison with troops, batteries, unprotected convoys, that in battle any movement on their part amounts to an immediate risk of annihilation. In reality, and failing a disproportionate superiority over the enemy, the present military machine has only one hope, that of defence. It was certain in advance that neither of the opposing forces on the western front would take upon itself to have its male population slaughtered in assaults after the style of Verdun."

Yet the lost capacity for mass offensives " is becoming the attribute of a new system." The fighting motor vehicle " occupies henceforward a dominant place in the scale of military values and offers possibilities of renewing a lost art." This is not to say that new weapons, tanks, aeroplanes, armoured cars are invulnerable, or that they can solve all problems. Infantry and artillery still have their function. But to-day, the mechanised weapon constitutes " the essential instrument of manœuvre, surprise and attack. In modern warfare, there is no longer any active enterprise possible, except by means of and within the capacities of mechanical force."

Now up till that time (January, 1940), none of the

adversaries had shown itself capable of "erecting mechanical force into a coherent, properly equipped and organised system, capable of taking upon itself the main effort of victory." The Germans, it is true, have come near to "a rational conception of war." Their offensive planes and heavy armoured units in combination enabled them to overwhelm Poland in a couple of weeks.

"But the inadequate number of planes and too light tanks which at the present moment the Reich is able to put into the line would be insufficient to break a French resistance based on the fortifications and obstacles of the Maginot Line. There is, moreover, every reason to believe that the German Government bitterly regrets to-day not having transformed its army much more completely. *None can reasonably doubt that if Germany had had at her disposal on September* 1*st last twice as many aeroplanes, a thousand* 100-*ton tanks, three thousand of fifty or thirty tons, and six thousand of ten to twenty tons, she would have annihilated France.*"

For our own part, we were even more strongly attached to out-of-date ideas: "We entered the war with five million men, but with an air force that can at best be called embryonic and tanks quite inadequate in number and power. Moreover, this modern weapon was built, organised and directed with the intention, not of striking hard, fast and far, but of acting only as a function of and within the mass system. Thus, as far as the air is concerned, only our fighters, in other words, purely defensive machines, counted, while as regards armoured vehicles we had in practice only light tanks, whose function was strictly defined and limited to dispersal in small groups among the ranks of the infantry."

De Gaulle then attacks the purely defensive principle. "On condition that we wash our hands of the rest of the world, it is *a priori* conceivable that we should limit our effort to holding a front along the line of our fortifications. By mobilising all our active population and then keeping it immobile, by sinking the whole of the wealth of France in concrete, by emptying our towns and villages of their inhabitants in order to protect them, by adopting once and

for all the strategy that consists of suffering blows without returning them, we might perhaps be able to maintain our present frontiers for a certain time. But none can doubt that the result achieved would still be precarious. *For everything leads one to the view that if the enemy has not yet been able to accumulate a mechanised force strong enough to break through our defensive lines, he is at work on one.*" Is this not prophetic?

General de Gaulle adds that the striking successes achieved by the Reich in Poland encourage the Germans only too much "to develop to the full and in the widest possible field the new technique." Despite the strengthening that has been done, the Maginot Line "is capable of being broken." Now "the method of attack capable of breaking it has at least a potential existence": German industry is capable of building the tanks which, used *en masse*, "could break through our defences, both active and passive."

"And so," he writes, "the conditions of the century-old contest between cannon and armour-plate now apply to the struggle between tanks and fortresses. Just as in former times, whatever kind of protective work was built, there always appeared a cannon—even if it had to be a 16-inch one—powerful enough to destroy it, so to-day we can at will build tanks capable of surmounting any known obstacle." It follows that a defensive force that restricts itself to fixed resistance is "destined to disaster." Only mechanised forces can defeat mechanised forces. Even if we limit ourselves to military action within our own frontiers, the creation of a shock mechanism is necessary, for "the indispensable instrument of modern defensive action" is "heavy counter-attack with aerial and land squadrons."

In any case, General de Gaulle does not believe that it is possible to restrict oneself to defensive warfare. If the Germans were certain of never being attacked in their Siegfried Line, they would have complete freedom to shift the weight of their attack to any point they might choose. "*In the present struggle, as in all those that have preceded it, to remain inert is to be beaten. To put us in a position to act instead of merely awaiting the actions of others we must create*

*a new instrument of war. Mechanised force on land, on sea and in the air will put us in a position to defend ourselves against any attack that Germany may ultimately launch, to seize jumping-off grounds and bases in the districts around Germany, to drive her forces from the regions she has conquered or may yet conquer, to immobilise her, to bombard her, so that we may drive our weapons into her body from all sides.*"

Then, the future leader of the Free French Forces points out the weaknesses of a system that places five millions of young and active Frenchmen in camps and bases in which, from the military point of view, they are useless. He believes that modern war cannot afford to place the majority of its employable men under arms, and that total warfare requires " total employment."

In the last section of his report, General de Gaulle demands a far-reaching reform of our military system. The men mobilised should be kept at the front " only in so far as this is compatible with the requirements of the necessary economic effort." The important thing is to forge the mechanised tools capable of giving us victory ; hence the need for a great industrial effort. He then indicates the proper methods of employment of the mechanised forces. We must create large units, equipped with everything necessary to enable them to carry an operation through to its proper conclusion. These mechanised units must not be intended merely to support and complete other units ; they must be autonomous. In the same way, we must create shock divisions in the air. " The combination of these large units into land and air corps will make possible wide breaches of defensive lines, operations conceived on a very big scale, and exploitation in depth of the results achieved, all of which constitute the tactic proper to mechanised formations, provided they are properly concentrated."

In his final words, General de Gaulle warned the French people against the illusion that the state of military immobility then existing was consistent with the general character of the war. " The opposite is the truth. The internal combustion engine gives to existing methods of destruction a power, a speed, a radius of action such that the present conflict must sooner or later be characterised by movement,

surprise, irruptions, pursuits whose speed and range will go far beyond those of the most lightning blows of the past. . . . While for five months masses of men . . . have been mobilised without having accomplished anything positive at any point of time or place, we have seen the onslaught of tanks and aeroplanes annihilate in two short weeks a good army of twelve hundred thousand men; we have seen winged engines of destruction in great numbers spraying death from end to end of great warring countries; we have seen ships operating over the full extent of the oceans, we have seen public opinion in the old and new worlds showing impassioned interest in mechanical force, because instinctively it sees in it the essential element of armed force."

Such, in outline, is the de Gaulle report. It is a document that gives us the measure of the obstinacy of a General Staff capable of refusing serious consideration to warnings of this kind.

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ROUTINE AND EMPIRICISM.

Not only were the conceptions of the General Staff out of date, but the working of the military machine itself revealed in many respects an outworn organisation. Routine and empiricism occupied too important a place. Military bureaucracy was no whit better than civil. It was frequently found responsible for delays in supply. The so-called technicians entrusted with purchases were in general incapable of energetic action and governed by old habits, deeply incrusted, so that the execution of urgent orders was often held up for long periods while they argued some minor detail with the manufacturer.

All this will surprise only those who were not able to see French officers last winter entangled in a mass of red tape. The offices of the General Staff and those of the regiments spent days and nights filling in forms, often to no purpose. The most insignificant document had to be completed in triplicate, even those known as "nil forms," or questionnaires to which all the replies were in the negative. Cavalry

divisions, for instance, were required periodically to fill in various forms in which the officers informed their immediate superiors that they had in their stables no mares "thought to be in foal." This is no exaggeration, as any Frenchman will readily understand. I could tell many similar stories, as for instance the one which relates how one of my colleagues, a motor cyclist for the duration, rode scores of kilometres in the snow to deliver these "nil forms" on some matter relating to military bands. In November, I went to visit an artillery Colonel encamped in a forest. To reach his hutment one had to wade almost knee-deep in mud, but he seemed much less afraid of being drowned in the water that trickled in from all sides than in the official forms that flowed in even faster. Every evening, by the light of a smoky oil-lamp, the poor man laboured to fill the archives of the War Ministry, in which tons of useless paper had already been accumulating for years.

The whole business is much less amusing than it may at first sight appear. These obsolete practices are the key to a state of mind whose most alarming aspect was the fact that respect for routine at the top invariably ended by infecting all ranks. The ideas of the High Command were usually shared by the headquarters of lower units. They too believed, despite all the lessons of events, in the plans and theories of their leaders. One illustration of this, a sad story which I heard recently from an English airman, must suffice. This man was liaison officer attached to a French formation. At the beginning of the offensive, somewhere about May 14th, he flew over Belgian Luxembourg. He found, quite clearly visible and without any possibility of error, a number of German motorised columns, and immediately notified the H.Q. of the ninth army. Nobody believed him. They said he must have mistaken for German columns some of the French ones that had moved into Belgium. For certain units of the ninth army, probably equivalent to about one division, had crossed the frontier, in pursuance of the general plan, within a few hours of the beginning of the invasion, and the Staff officers could not believe that enemy motorised columns were already massed in Belgian Luxembourg, ready to attempt the

crossing of the Meuse. They could not believe it because nothing of this kind had been provided for in the plan. . . .

Stupidity carried to such a point moves one almost to despair. And yet, despite the mass of mistakes made, the situation was not in fact necessarily desperate. Seen in their proper perspective, the General Staff of 1914 was in no way better than that of 1939, either in its preparation for the war or in its conduct of actual operations during the first few months. Such indeed was very far from being the case, yet in spite of many and varied errors, we won the war. The mistakes of Gamelin, his colleagues and predecessors would not alone have sufficed to lead us into the abyss. At the very worst, we could have saved our honour. To bring us to the most shameful capitulation in our whole military history, treachery had to be added to incompetence

## 3. THE CRIME OF WEYGAND

### Was Weygand a Good General?

There are some people whose excessive delicacy of feeling makes them hesitate to use the word treachery, otherwise than to describe those who for personal gain betray their country to a foreign power. That, no doubt, is the supreme form of treachery. And it would certainly not occur to any reasonable man to claim that Weygand handed over his country for personal gain, or in conformity with some pre-arranged agreement with the Germans. But the words traitor and treachery can quite properly be applied to other kinds of activity, in which personal gain forms no part of the motive. A man may, for example, reasonably be accused of treachery if, without there being the slightest suspicion of bribery by a foreign power, he finds himself at the head of the State or the army and fails to place the national interest above all others, including class interests. This was the crime of Weygand, of Baudouin and of their accomplices.

Before this point is developed any further, one question must be asked and answered. Was Weygand a good General? It cannot be denied that he had, among the parties of the Right, fanatical friends, always inclined to

vaunt his military genius. There were, in addition, many men on the Left who, while quite rightly regarding Weygand as a Fascist, capable of strangling the Republic if opportunity offered, were none the less ready to concede him great ability as a soldier. Much of this was attributable to the way in which his admirers habitually spoke of him, to their habit of insinuating that he has a genius as great as or greater than his master, Foch. Sometimes they came very near to whispering that it was to him that Foch's victories were due. How could the layman disprove suggestions of this kind? None, literally none, had been present at those meetings between Foch and Weygand at which military operations were discussed. At these meetings, Foch would walk up and down the room, biting at his cigar. Tipping back his cap a little, he would walk up to a map hanging on the wall, muttering a few words as he pointed to some spot on it. "I shall stop them here" he would say, or "I shall bar the road there," or something else, equally laconic. At such moments he spoke in almost unintelligible fashion, using odds and ends of sentences, of which the hearer often caught no more than a few striking words here and there. While this was going on, Weygand, a diligent and intelligent officer, would be working at his desk. He was quite used to the Marshal's jargon, which he understood and summarised with perfect clarity. By the end of the discussion, Foch's orders had been so clearly formulated that anyone could understand them.

In this way the legend of Weygand's genius was born. As years passed and memories of Foch became vaguer, the friends of the future capitulant had time to build up their claim that Foch would have been nothing without his Chief of Staff, to whom belonged the honour of the most daring elements of Foch's strategy. To-day we know much more clearly where we stand. The strategy of the generalissimo of 1940 proves beyond all doubt that the real genius was Foch, and that Weygand was no more that a first class subordinate. And it may be added that the ordinary Frenchman, who has no contact with the political *salons* and did not enjoy the confidences of those in the know, had always suspected as much.

In fact, there is nothing to justify the view that the General Staff around 1930 was free from addiction to routine and laziness, or that it was Gamelin who brought these vices with him when, in peacetime, he succeeded the man who was to oust him in turn in wartime. Weygand failed as completely as Gamelin to understand the importance of mechanised warfare. A story told by Paul Reynaud is significant on this point. Towards the end of May, Reynaud, as Prime Minister, insisted in an interview with Weygand that resistance was not enough, and that a counter-attack should be launched in the neighbourhood of Rheims. When, to support his view, Reynaud quoted an opinion expressed a few days earlier by General de Gaulle, Weygand, interrupting in peremptory fashion, replied " He's only a youngster."

It is, of course, true that de Gaulle is no more than fifty, which is very young for a General. But even an old man like Weygand cannot really regard a man of fifty as a mere stripling. The word youngster came spontaneously to the lips of Weygand, normally fully in control of his speech, because in his heart of hearts he retained all the prejudices of the General Staff against innovation. A youngster, in his mouth, meant simply a visionary, a poet who had not learned to judge military realities by the well-tried standards of G.H.Q.

### Military Blunders.

It was on May 29th that Weygand became Commander-in-Chief. It was on June 5th that the Germans launched their second offensive. If he had been a Napoleon or even a Foch, then was his opportunity to show it. Far from doing so, he gave proof only of his own inadequacy for his task. In a recent book on de Gaulle, Mr. James Marlow has summarised the purely military errors with which the latter reproaches Weygand. Here is his list. (1) When de Gaulle asked the Commander-in-Chief to combine in a single unit the thousand tanks available to the south of the Somme, so as to facilitate a mass attack and not risk the destruction of our best weapons in purely fragmentary

attacks, Weygand promised, but failed to keep his promise. (2) In opposition to the opinion of de Gaulle, Weygand remained in favour of fighting along a front, instead of relying on defence in depth; Weygand's tactic therefore kept the army perpetually on the move, tired the troops and consequently discouraged them. (3) De Gaulle wanted to move up to the Somme our best troops, who were in the Maginot Line, in Alsace and in Lorraine. Weygand refused.

To these already very serious reproaches, Mr. Marlow adds that of having refused, during the last phase, to continue the fight in North Africa. This, however, takes us outside the field of purely military criticism, as does everything touching the last phase. What took place here was something more than a mistake. We shall have more to say on this matter below. Within the military field itself, however, there is one more mistake of Weygand's which must be pointed out. With all the shortsightedness that had characterised Gamelin, he failed to grasp the importance of the Schlieffen Plan. When once he had admitted that the Germans intended to reach the Seine, he should have taken steps to fortify it as soon as he took over the command. Between May 19th and June 6th there was no lack of time, and labour was plentiful.

### Weygand's Lack of Faith.

What Weygand especially lacked was that essential quality of great leaders, the will to win at all costs that springs from the certainty of victory. Opinions on Joffre may differ, but none can deny that this solid and stolid soldier, tenacious to the point of obstinacy, was animated by an unflagging faith in ultimate victory. How could one expect from a mercenary General, a Belgian aristocrat whose birth is still enveloped in mystery and who was entered at Saint Cyr under a false name, how, I repeat, could one expect from such a man the understanding of the destiny of France that characterised Joffre, that robust Southerner, that son of the people whose virtues and defects had been solidly forged in the flame of traditional French democracy?

When Weygand arrived from Syria he looked young and agile. "This septuagenarian is as slim as a lieutenant," wrote the journalists. But it would have been better that he should reveal layer upon layer of fat if, with the rather bull-like appearance of Joffre, he could have combined Joffre's faith in French resistance. He arrived, on the contrary, in a mood of anything but confidence, sombre and almost hopeless. Those who were in his confidence declared, with appropriately grave faces and heavy sighs, that the General was full of courage, that he had accepted a superhuman task, that his rôle was undoubtedly that of the doctor called to the bedside of a dying man. These were the actual words of one of his intimates, and if I do not quote others, it is for fear of compromising those who heard them.

Yet Weygand is not without intelligence. On his first visit to the front, he saw that the situation was not desperate, that there were battles still to be fought and won. Gradually he became more confident. Hence his optimistic order of the day. One day in Paris, while fighting was in progress between Calais and Abbeville, journalists in contact with the General Staff declared that Weygand was now certain of success, certain that "not a single German would be left alive on French soil."

At this time, perhaps, Weygand may have hoped with the victor's laurels on his brow, soon to embark on the career as dictator of which he must often have dreamed. The conjecture is not an unreasonable one. Republicans in France have always mistrusted Weygand. Clemenceau had little confidence in "this Belgian." The parties of the Left were alarmed during his period at the head of the General Staff and relieved when he left. He was regarded as a potential rebel, capable of taking the lead in a coup d'état if ever circumstances favoured one—it being, of course, clearly understood that if he was a Fascist, he was cautious and supple-minded, and therefore unlikely to risk anything on a long chance. Nevertheless, however great the aversion he inspired in democrats, there was no recrimination in their ranks when Paul Reynaud appointed him to the High Command. To the best of my knowledge,

neither Edouard Herriot nor Léon Blum raised the slightest objection. Weygand was regarded as a leader of real ability and that alone counted. The Left placed national salvation above all other considerations, and they were entitled to believe that the principle that inspired their attitude would inspire equally that of Weygand. Their mistake was to a certain extent justified by the knowledge that Weygand, like Gamelin, had disapproved of the Munich agreements. They were entitled to hope that he was capable, despite his opinions, of putting before everything else the honour of the country that had given him fame. Facts soon showed that this hope was illusory.

### The Tragic Events of June.

With the first checks to his army during the second German offensive in June, the General who preferred foreign dictatorship to popular resistance began to appear in his true light. I know, of course, that on June 7th he issued an order of the day calling on the troops to maintain their positions at any cost, that on the 9th he again ordered them to hold on. But in fact, from the 8th onwards, when the Germans had crossed the Somme and reached Forges-les-Eaux, it became evident that everything was being allowed to drift. Weygand had realised that only a desperate effort by the whole nation—meaning, for practical purposes, a revolutionary war—could now save us. And he would have none of it.

There was no need of extensive knowledge of strategy to see from the beginning of the second offensive that the Germans, still pursuing the Schlieffen Plan, were aiming at the valley of the Seine. What kind of serious effort was made to stop them? Were the roads mined? Was anything done, in view of the possibility of the passage of the Seine being forced, to fortify positions on the Loire? Did these fanatical devotees of concrete build a single pill-box? What was needed was preparation for the most desperate defence of the whole country, orders to the troops in the Maginot Line to move towards the south-west, to avoid

the capture of millions of men, perhaps the best of our army. We should have prepared to resist foot by foot, to defend Paris. But on the 10th the Government fled from the capital and on the 13th Paris was declared an open town. If the decision had not been reached by devilishly cunning degrees, if it had not been announced amid the general alarm of mind, at a time when a large part of the population had fled behind the Government, the General Staff would not have succeeded in compelling the Parisians to capitulate without fighting. In September, 1914, when there were suggestions in the Cabinet for not defending Paris, Jules Guesde, the well-known Marxian socialist, leapt to his feet with his beard bristling and his finger pointing at the partisans of surrender and cried in his piercing voice, "If the Germans enter Paris, the rifles will go off of their own accord in the working-class quarters."

These workers' rifles that go off alone may yet impose democracy in France by revolution, and for Weygand this must be the most terrifying of visions. For there can be no doubt that Weygand's views on the Commune are those of Galliffet, and that if circumstances demanded it he would shoot down the "rabble" as did the General-Marquis of bitter memory.

We ought then to have defended Paris. We ought to have declared that the fatherland was in danger and decreed the *levée en masse*. Here I imagine some of my readers shrugging their shoulders. "What," they may say. "After spending so many pages in denouncing the mental inertia of a General Staff unable to understand mechanised warfare, he is now advocating the methods of 1793. He is not even as progressive as the soldiers."

But it was not, in fact, a question of copying the methods of 1793. To send men out to fight tanks with rifles would have been useless. The *levée en masse* could have been adapted to the conditions of modern warfare. The whole of the active strength of the country could have been used to mine the roads, dig tank-traps, build pill-boxes, transform the whole country into an entrenched camp. In short, we could have defended our territory inch by inch, appealing to the patriotism of the masses who have shown themselves

in every great crisis of our history, capable of the uprising whence victory can come.

Who, however, can fail to see that such a call to the masses, such an appeal to their Republican feeling, must take on a semi-revolutionary character? No such project could have occurred to the minds of General Weygand or most of his colleagues. To a resistance born of the revolutionary spirit of the people, a resistance from which could spring at some more or less distant date what they would call disorders and what I would call a new order, to such a resistance they preferred defeat.

It should not be said that such a belief in the possibilities of resistance is over-optimistic. We had fresh troops and guns—the 75's which, firing through open sights, could stop tanks. We had 'planes. It now appears that less than a third of our airmen had been used. Besides, who can be sure that the Germans were not beginning to tire? First-class historians, Jean Jaurès in particular, have shown that in 1871 the partisans of resistance were right, that the Germans could have been beaten if we had gone on fighting as Gambetta wished, that the soldiers of William I were more tired than had been thought. In 1940 a similar hypothesis was at least equally valid. And in 1940, not only was it possible that the enemy was beginning to tire, but we had at our disposal troops much better than those available to Gambetta.

Even up to the very last minute resistance was still possible. At Tours on June 12th and 13th Georges Mandel, de Gaulle and some of their Cabinet colleagues had wished to create a bridgehead in Brittany. The Government would have gone to Quimper, and from Brest large numbers of fresh troops could have been sent to England, as well as the younger men awaiting their call-up and some from the reserved occupations, who could have been employed over here. But the defeatists gained the day against a weak Premier. Instead of going to Brittany, they went to Bordeaux, the town whose Mayor was the defeatist Marquet, a town packed with refugees and already a prey to waves of panic.

Yet even from Bordeaux resistance could have been tried,

resistance to the bitter end, resistance on the Adour, making the enemy pay dearly for every inch of territory. None can measure the capacity of resistance of a people to whom an appeal has been made in time of danger. If we had been able to hold for a few weeks only, the situation would have been transformed. At least we could have held on long enough to enable us to embark large forces for North Africa. It is well known that General de Gaulle urged to the very end this last form of resistance. Men of such different political views as Paul Reynaud, Georges Mandel, Edouard Herriot, Louis Marin, Léon Blum, Jeanneney made the same effort, but in vain. Weygand, the Commander-in-Chief, favoured an armistice. The defeatist, Baudouin, and his accomplices found their task easy. I deliberately make no reference at this point to Marshal Pétain ; a later chapter will be devoted to him. The case of this old man is not the same as that of Weygand, and is a matter rather for a specialist in diseases of childhood.

CONFESSION.

That the High Command had lost all spirit of initiative during the week preceding the armistice no longer requires demonstration. Disorder and flight were everywhere the order of the day. Whenever the presence of a motorised column was announced from some locality or other, the Press services of the War Ministry hastened to announce that it was a question only of an isolated column which would soon be cut off ; the mass of the enemy troops was still far away. The incredible part is that the explanation was not wholly false. The columns often were in fact far distant from the main army. But they were rarely cut off, and the main forces soon joined the vanguard.

The French units were without instructions, or received contradictory ones. The disorganisation was complete. Refugees packed the roads and prevented troop movements. Wireless services broke down in part. The arrival of German troops always caused surprise, and sometimes the Nazis themselves seemed surprised to find themselves advancing so quickly. A French liaison officer attached to

the British Army told me that on June 5th, in the neighbourhood of Forges-les-Eaux, during an armoured-car reconnaissance, he found himself face to face at thirty yards' distance with a German armoured vehicle which turned tail, as did the French car. What a picture of the confusion of those last days! From the same source I learned that two command posts, one of infantry, the other of artillery, and both belonging to the same army, sought each other for thirty-six hours before being able to re-establish contact.

It was in Brittany that the disorder reached its height. In one of the Breton towns a party of motor-cyclists arrived one day without anyone trying to stop them. Astonished at this easy victory, they wandered through the streets, saluting the French officers whom they met. It was several hours before they were joined by the main units. . . . In Brest the arsenal was packed with munitions. Workmen from the town have assured me that no orders were given for their destruction, and they were compelled themselves to take the initiative in the matter. . . . One could continue almost endlessly with stories of this kind.

It may be said that negligence and stupidity are satisfactory explanations of all this. To say that Weygand during the last eight days had lost all will to resist and preferred defeat to " the danger of revolution " is, after all, a very serious accusation. May it not be that the author of such an accusation is merely expressing his own political prejudices?

The answer is that political prejudice has played no part in any of the judgments expressed in this book. To Louis Marin, leader of the Right in France, but a patriot, I pay and shall continue to pay the tribute he deserves. In my efforts to explain the mentality of Weygand I have been influenced by no political passion. There is abundant evidence to prove that as the end approached the generalissimo was preoccupied above all by the danger of disorder and revolution. An English Conservative M.P. who was able to talk to him was astonished to find him much more alarmed by the possibility of revolution than by the consequences of capitulation. And here is the final proof. At Tours, replying to advocates of resistance at a Cabinet

meeting, who pointed out that we still had fresh troops, he replied : " *I still have fresh divisions. I intend to keep them to maintain order.*"

This is full confession. In this sentence Weygand reveals his mind. These few words explain everything. They prove that class prejudice was his guiding motive. The Fascist in him preferred a German victory to revolution. And, to his mind, democracy and revolution were the same thing.

It should be noted that apparently he had not weighed all the consequences of capitulation. Like Pétain, he must have hoped for "a peace between soldiers," peace "with honour." These gentlemen never understood the real nature of Hitlerism. They always imagined the Reichswehr to possess a power which in fact it lost some time ago. They imagined that they could discuss with von Brauschitz as they had negotiated with the Kaiser's Generals. They would, they thought, be compelled to accept some territorial sacrifices, they would have to give up Alsace-Lorraine, perhaps even the Briey ironfields. But since they would also destroy the Republic and French democracy, since France would henceforward be governed by a military régime attractive to the German army, the country would nevertheless retain within its mutilated borders an independent existence, free from the control of Hitler. The political blindness and the complacency of our future dictators are such that they certainly did caress this illusion. There is, then, no doubt that Weygand believed in the possibility of coming to terms with his opposite numbers of the Reichswehr. He certainly did not desire to hand over his country, gagged and bound, to the Führer. Domination by Hitler is not his ideal, but he prefers it none the less to revolution, to the Popular Front, to the rule of the "rabble."

Yet even when one has explained the behaviour of Weygand, of Baudouin and of some of the puppets of the Pétain Cabinet, there are still questions to be answered. Weygand, Baudouin and the others are only the representatives of the French governing classes. They were convinced that their actions would have the approval of these

governing classes, blinded by class prejudice. They knew also that they would be accepted without too much difficulty by some sections of the middle and even of the working classes. They were convinced of this, and rightly so, because the task of the French Fascists had been precisely to bring together these different elements, either under the banner of the defence of property or under that of the defence of peace and so to make of them the unconscious agents of Fascism.

If, after all, it was possible for Baudouin and his like to come to power, despite the fact that the country had shown its dislike of Fascism every time it had been freely consulted, it is because years of patient labour by the French Fascists had brought confusion and disorder among the different classes of French society. The fact of the capitulation, the presence in office of those who were responsible for it can therefore not be understood if we do not first inquire what was French Fascism, what were the methods it chose to reach its goal, how it succeeded in disintegrating all political parties, from the Right to the extreme Left.

# CHAPTER II

# FRENCH FASCISM

## 1. FEBRUARY 6TH AND THE POPULAR FRONT

### THE CAUSES OF THE RIOTS.

FOREIGN countries often forget what happened in Paris on February 6th, 1934. Or, if they remember it, they fail to attribute to it the importance it deserves. Yet February 6th is one of the outstanding dates in French history. The events of that day had an undoubted influence on the history of our country, so much so indeed that it is impossible to trace the political causes of the French collapse and the French capitulation without going back to that date.

On February 6th, 1934, the Fascists tried to strangle the Republic. I know, of course, that they deny this. But the fact is that the French Fascists—except those of the *Action Française*—have never admitted their anti-republicanism. Some of them carried discretion to the point of refusing to call themselves Fascists. France was a country in which republican feeling and hatred of Fascism were so deeply rooted that a frontal attack on them was a thing to be feared. The effort to impose Fascism on France required a carefully prepared indirect approach. But on February 6th the Fascists nearly succeeded in their enterprise.

They had succeeded in enlisting on their side, or at least in appearing so to do, a very popular ally, the desire for honesty in politics. The French worker, the French middle class have a tradition of probity of which they are justly proud, and they are easily aroused when honesty is in question. And the French Fascists showed their apprecia-tion of this fact by making skilful use of a financial scandal in which a certain number—a very small number—of

Members of Parliament were involved. This scandal was the Stavisky affair. All this took place in January. The Chautemps Cabinet was then in office, and among its members was one, now dead, of whom it was said, rightly or wrongly, that he was implicated in the Stavisky affair. I do not propose to recount here the story of this affair of graft, pawnshop swindles and dishonesty practised with the assistance of a few unimportant politicians and corrupt officials. What is important is that the Fascists made use of the scandal to throw mud not only at the Chautemps Government, but also at Parliament and the Republic. During the month of January a number of young Fascists, among whom the leading rôle was played by the *camelots du Roi* of the *Action Française*, began to excite public opinion in Paris. They organised noisy manifestations in the student quarter of Paris and committed several acts of violence. The Government, in its weakness, failed to prevent the creation of an atmosphere of civil war. And it must be added that the Government received very little support from the police, under the command of Jean Chiappe, an accomplice of the Fascists.

The pose of virtue assumed by Fascists of the Chiappe type did not suit them well. Ordinary people could not forget that three years before, politicians who were close friends of Tardieu and Chiappe had been closely concerned in the Oustric affair. It was particularly amusing to see the Right majority of the Paris municipal council talking of Parliamentary corruption, when that same council had to the public knowledge among its members many who were notoriously lacking in financial and political honesty.

But the campaign rose in intensity. Many well-meaning people were alarmed by the denunciations of the Fascist press. And at the beginning of January, when feeling was at its height, and when the young Fascist hooligans had had sufficient practice in street rioting, the decision to deliver the main blow was taken. Chautemps had resigned, and Daladier had taken office. To appease the Right, he had tried to form a ministry including members of the so-called "moderate" parties. But when the Moderates failed him, this man whom many people liked to regard as energetic

and tenacious changed his line and formed a Left Ministry, whose first act was to sack Chiappe.

### A Plan for Civil War.

During all this time the great manifestation was being prepared: the idea was to march on the Chamber of Deputies and throw out the "corrupt" members. The Fascist leaders had so successfully concealed their intentions that they had been able to attract the assistance of many perfectly honest people whose main interests were wholly non-political. Where they showed their greatest cunning was in organising a manifestation by ex-soldiers, who believed in all sincerity that they were protesting against corruption, and never for a moment suspected that they would be used for an attack on the Parliamentary régime and on Republican democracy.

The general plan was a clever one, which did full credit to the Fascist strategists. One body of demonstrators was to reach the Place de la Concorde from the north, by the rue Royale: these were the super-Fascist units of the Royalist *Action Française* and the *Solidarité Française* of Jean Renaud—the latter quite simply a caricature of foreign Fascist movements. To the south, behind the Palais Bourbon (the Palace of the Chamber of Deputies), which, as is well known, faces the Place de la Concorde, from which it is separated by a bridge, were the *Croix de Feu* of Colonel de la Rocque. From the east, or more precisely from the Town Hall, were to come Taittinger's *Jeunesses Patriotes*, led by reactionary municipal Councillors. They were to cross the Seine near Notre Dame and follow the left bank as far as the Chamber. The ingenuity of the plan can be made clear, even to those who do not know Paris. Towards seven o'clock in the evening the northern column was to reach the Place de la Concorde, thrust aside the police guards, cross the bridge and arrive in front of the Chamber in time to be joined by the *Jeunesses Patriotes* arriving from the east. Meanwhile the *Croix de Feu* were to have entered the Chamber from the courtyard in the rear.

So much for the north, the east and the south. What of the west? It was in this sector that the Fascists showed their greatest skill: to the west, on the right bank of the river, along the Champs-Elysées, were massed the columns representing the ex-service men's associations. When once the Fascist groups had met in front of the Chamber and begun to occupy it, the ex-soldiers were to cross the bridge and thus lend the Fascists their wholly innocent and unsuspecting support.

### The Sixth of February.

The plan nearly succeeded. The various organisations involved, and behind which were a number of individuals always highly suspect, and undoubtedly in contact with foreign Fascist movements, had enlisted large numbers of doubtful characters of the type always available when trouble threatens and that Marx had called the *Lumpenproletariat*. During the day, before the beginning of the manifestation proper, hired hooligans were at work, setting fire to buses in the Place de la Concorde and slashing the feet of the horses of the Republican Guard with razor blades.

In the Chamber, fear ran through the ranks. I do not mean that all the Deputies were afraid, or even that the majority of them were, but a handful of cowards is often enough to create an impression of panic. I have kept memories of this occasion that even the war has not been able to eradicate; I remember one particular future colleague of Pétain, his features drawn, his skin the kind of bluish-grey colour that one saw later on the face of Georges Bonnet in the days immediately before Munich. In the Chamber itself, Léon Blum was at the Tribune, giving sensible advice, approved by men of all parties who had retained their faith in the régime and kept their heads. Behind him the Speaker, Fernand Bouisson, was less heroic. "Get on with it," he said, leaning forward from his presidential chair towards the Socialist leader, "Get on with it, they're coming."

And indeed they were. The *Croix de Feu* were streaming out of the rue de Bourgogne, moving towards the rear of the Palace. An adjutant of the *Garde Mobile* stopped them. He ordered Colonel de la Rocque to withdraw, threatening, as was his duty, to give the order to fire if he was not obeyed. La Rocque had to yield. Throughout the evening there were riots in the Place de la Concorde and its immediate neighbourhood. Some of the Fascists fired and many policemen and mobile guards were hit. The police forces guarding the bridge were compelled to use their rifles, but recourse was only had to these extreme measures—despite all that has been said, and sometimes written, to the contrary —after proper warning had been given.

Nevertheless, the Government won. During the night this first rising was mastered. But energetic measures were needed during the following day to prevent a recurrence of the manifestations, and rigorous action against the instigators of the riots should have been taken. Daladier chose instead to resign. I can still see him as I did then, on the 7th, in one of the salons of the Quai d'Orsay. He was standing with bent head, talking sadly in a low voice, with slow emphasis on each syllable. He explained that to check the demonstrators, who would certainly assemble again that evening if he remained in office, he would have had to call in the army—the police and mobile guards being inadequate. He did not wish, he said, to have recourse to a measure of this kind, because of his anxiety " not to shed the blood of the little soldiers of France."

Was it true that the police would have been unable to deal with the rioters if they had staged a fresh demonstration that evening? I am not convinced that they could—far from convinced. But my opinion of Daladier's energy was formed on that day and has never changed since: *It was thanks to him that for the first time the Government of the Republic accepted defeat at the hands of a street mob.* And the memory of the occasion always brings to my mind another one; in London on September 17th, 1938, I caught a glimpse of the same Daladier, his face again saddened. He had just agreed to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. The puppets of Vichy are indeed inconsiderate;

they might at least have shown some gratitude to the Prime Minister who twice surrendered to Fascism, once at home and once abroad; who bears the double responsibility for February 7th and for Munich.

### THE BIRTH OF THE POPULAR FRONT.

The Doumergue Government which succeeded that of Daladier was divided. It included on the one hand the Radicals, who had agreed to join it only in order to avoid civil war, but it also included men favourable to Fascism and ready to submit more or less openly to its dictates. Gaston Doumergue, a democrat who had abandoned his faith, belonged to this second group. In the autumn he prepared a number of proposals for reform of the constitution, intended to reduce considerably the prerogatives of Parliament. But he encountered the opposition of Herriot and was compelled to give way and resign.

Let there, however, be no mistake on one point. It is no denial of the value of Herriot's intervention on that occasion to say that he could have done nothing had he not been conscious of the fact that he was accurately interpreting the mind of the masses, who had seen on February 6th the evidences of a Fascist threat and were resolved to meet it. As early as February 12th, millions of Republicans throughout France had taken part in demonstrations organised by the C.G.T., the French T.U.C. In the months that followed the movement born on that day grew enormously in scope.

Such a movement of resistance to dictatorship was wholly in accord with French democratic traditions. Within the last half century alone, every time reaction had become a serious threat, notably at the time of the Boulangist movement and the Dreyfus affair, the Republicans had formed a united front against the common enemy. The lower middle classes, the intellectuals, the peasants and the working-class united spontaneously. But this time the union of the Left parties assumed a new garb, born of the new circumstances. It was no longer merely a matter of a Parliamentary *bloc*,

under the ægis of political leaders, it was a movement springing spontaneously from the masses. The general fear of Fascism led to the creation of numerous points of resistance in every corner of France. Thus there was born the National Committee of the *Rassemblement Populaire*, in which were represented not only political parties, but also Trade Unions, intellectual organisations and economic defence committees. And since it was no longer, as it had been on earlier occasions, merely a question of meeting a threat of dictatorship and replacing one set of M.P.'s by another, but of organising an effective struggle against Fascism, the task this time was to attack all those things which had led to the growth of Fascist movements in certain European countries. Hence the idea of a common programme to be presented to the electors in 1936 and the assumption that if the parties presenting the programme found favour with the electors, it would be for them to form a Government to apply that programme. Many good democrats in England, and even some members of the Labour Party were surprised to find French Socialists supporting the Popular Front, with its implication of alliance with the Communist Party, for the purpose of carrying out the task the Government would have to undertake. These critics have not fully understood the conditions of the struggle in France, or the individualism of the average Frenchman, who finds it difficult to accept party membership and discipline. A single political body, even one as powerful as the French Socialist Party, could never have brought together all the anti-Fascist elements. It needed the assistance of the Radicals, who have many sincere democrats among their voters, and it needed also that of the Communists. We shall have occasion in a later chapter to discuss the Communists, and we shall do so without hatred or affection, but honestly and not omitting to mention their mistakes. What must be said now is that it is a fact, even if a regrettable fact, that the Communists still had a great influence among considerable sections of the working classes. And since, for reasons that need not be discussed at this point, they agreed to share in the fight against the common enemy, how could Socialists and

Democrats refuse their aid? If they had refused they would have lost not only the support of the Communists and their sympathisers, but also that of many non-party voters, who could not conceive of a Popular Front which did not include all the forces of the Left, without exception.

MAY–JUNE, 1936.

Be that as it may, the Popular Front was victorious at the elections of May, 1936, and secured an enormous majority. Not only the Fascists, but also the "moderate Republicans," representing a considerable portion of the middle strata of the bourgeoisie, were alarmed by this result. They were still more alarmed when, immediately after the elections, strikes broke out and the French working class made use for the first time of "stay-in" methods. From the strictly legal point of view, there can be no two opinions about stay-in strikes: they are illegal. But the conditions in which they broke out explain their origin. The workers had suffered from the economic crisis and from low wages. An election had just given power to political parties which had undertaken to remedy this state of affairs. Immediately, therefore, the workers demanded better conditions of their employers, and to back up this demand they made use of their legal weapon, the strike. If to the legal weapon they added the illegal weapon of factory occupation, that was simply because they understood that unemployment gives to the employers the opportunity to replace strikers as and when they like. The strikers therefore naturally looked upon the stay-in method as a guarantee against dismissal and blacklegging. Whether or not certain sections of the workers' movement tried to make use of the stay-in strikes for their own purposes, or made no effort to stop them, is another matter. In the eyes of the worker they were no more than a spontaneous manifestation of legitimate impatience.

It must be admitted, moreover, that the stay-in strikes were marked by a complete absence of any act of vandalism; the men kept their machines in order, the women knitted

or sewed. Nevertheless terror gripped the governing classes and even, I repeat, certain sections of the bourgeoisie.

The Popular Front Government was not due to take office until mid-June. Until then the Government of Albert Sarraut remained in office. But what kind of appeal to the workers was possible from such a Government, whose proper duty was merely to carry on non-controversial business until it was replaced? The President of the Republic, Albert Lebrun, appealed to Léon Blum to speak directly to the workers and announce the reforms he proposed to introduce in the field of labour and social legislation; Blum agreed, went to the microphone and promised that the new Government would apply the programme of the Popular Front, that the workers should have their collective contracts, their paid holidays, forty-hour week, and so on.

It must not, however, be concluded from this that President Lebrun was a Bolshevik or even an eager supporter of the social reforms of the Popular Front! No man could be more timid. He was not indeed a Fascist, but he was violently anti-Socialist, the most typical example of the hesitant "moderate." But he knew that the bourgeoisie were trembling, and he trembled with them. He wept over the miseries of a time that compelled him, if he was to fulfil his constitutional rôle, to offer office to a Marxist. But at least the worst could be avoided. If reforms were not promised, revolution might follow. So Blum was hurried to the microphone. Lebrun, indeed, was not alone in his attitude; the leaders of the French employers, it is said, joined him in begging Blum to speak. . . .

These things had to be said. There are too many so-called experts anxious to reproach the Popular Front Government with what they now call its too hasty reforms. What they forget is that the surgeon was not able to operate at leisure; he had to take up his scalpel at a moment's notice in an effort to save the life of a very sick patient whose health had been ruined by quacks and whose temperature was rising, hour by hour.

## 2. THE REVENGE

It was the great fear of the bourgeoisie that made it possible to secure without great difficulty the signature of the representatives of the French employers to the Matignon agreements[1] which, immediately after Blum's accession to office, transformed the condition of the working classes in France and placed the whole of the relations between employers and employed on a new basis. It was this same fear which led the Senate to offer only the mildest resistance. The second Chamber, elected, it must be remembered, by a much more restricted suffrage than that of the Chamber of Deputies, was soon to fight hard against the Blum Cabinet and in the end to defeat it, but in June and July it adopted a relatively conciliatory attitude. It accepted, in outline at least, and with no more than occasional modifications of detail, the social legislation of the Popular Front.

But the fear soon passed. By the middle of summer, the opponents of the Government were able to raise their heads again and plan their coming revenge. On this point, it must be admitted, the Blum Cabinet itself is not without its share of responsibility, as I shall try to show later. What is certain is that the Conservatives and the big employers soon began to see signs of weakness—and there were several —in this Government of "revolutionaries." There had been talk of purging the Civil Service of those of its high officials who showed Fascist leanings, but the purge, in so far as it took place at all, was completely lacking in vigour, so that some of the Ministers were just as much in the hands of their officials as their predecessors had been. Nor is that all. In the name of liberalism, the idea of freedom of the press was confused with that of freedom to libel anyone at will. The weekly, *Gringoire*, whose director, H. de Carbuccia, is a son-in-law of Chiappe, was allowed without interference to conduct an infamous and libellous campaign against the Minister of the Interior, Roger Salengro, whom

[1] So called after the Hotel Matignon, the Prime Minister's offices, in which the agreements had been discussed and signed.

it drove to suicide. Where the Fascists and reactionaries were able to realise most clearly the weakness of their opponents was in the field of foreign affairs, in which they maintained a continuous pressure. So that revenge soon came. In June, 1937, the Blum Cabinet was defeated, and with a brief interval of Chautemps Government, there came in April, 1938, the constitution of a Daladier Cabinet which was in practice a Cabinet of the Right, in the sense that it was supported and defended with passionate enthusiasm by the Right. This parliamentary revenge, moreover, indeed all that was done openly, constitutes only a part of the story. Something must also be said of the extent to which the revenge of the Fascists took the form of enticing into their system Conservative and Right-wing politicians who at first were in no way Fascist, but who allowed themselves, consciously or unconsciously, to become the accomplices of Fascism.

### The Terrorist Attacks.

Although one of the first acts of the Popular Front Government, with its Socialist majority, was to dissolve the armed Fascist leagues, the Fascists never for a single moment relaxed their efforts. They transformed their leagues into political parties and, in addition, set up secret organisations. Under the direction and guidance of German, and perhaps still more of Italian Fascism, they began to plan terrorist attacks. The wits of Paris tried to laugh off the revelations of the Socialist Minister of the Interior, Marx Dormoy, but the facts are beyond dispute. There was a Secret Committee for Revolutionary Action (the C.S.A.R.), with members enrolled under oath and wearing masks and hoods. Stores of arms of German and Italian origin were found hidden in several quarters of Paris and in a number of provincial towns. Many highly-placed persons, of whom General Dusseigneur is a typical example, were implicated in the plot that was being hatched.

The Right tried hard to throw ridicule on the police discoveries and became heavily sarcastic about the " hooded

men." But their too evident purpose was to hide their own embarrassment and cover up the crimes that had led to the discovery of this secret organisation. In the course of 1937 all kinds of political crimes were committed in various parts of France. Two Italian anti-Fascists, the brothers Rosselli, were assassinated. There was an outrage at Toussus-le-Noble, near Toulouse. There was an attempt made almost openly to "kidnap" a Spanish Republican submarine at Brest. Bombs were thrown into the flat of General Prételat. There were, above all, on Saturday, September 11th, the outrages of the rue de Presbourg and the rue Boissière in Paris, in which bombs were left in front of the offices of two big employers' associations near the Arc de Triomphe. One of these was the General Confederation of French Employers in the rue de Presbourg, the other the Group of Metallurgical, Engineering and Allied Industries of the Paris Region, in the rue Boissière. The bombs caused considerable damage, and two policemen were killed.

All these crimes were the work of the "Cagoulards," the "hooded men," acting on behalf of foreign Fascist movements. Most people suspected this from the beginning, and later on the facts were established beyond dispute. But that did not prevent the *Temps*, the organ of the *Comité des Forges* and the *Comité des Houillères*, the paper that Jules Guesde used to call "la bourgeoisie faite journal," the soul of the bourgeoisie in a newspaper, from blaming them on the working class and the Popular Front. The *Temps* indignantly rejected the suggestion that it was accusing the C.G.T. and the workers' organisations of the actual preparation and carrying out of the outrages, but it left no doubt as to where it thought the moral responsibility lay Its editorial columns claimed that "a Marxist and Syndicalist campaign against the established social order is at the bottom of the affair," and spoke of "anti-capitalist agitations," which, it said, were "indirectly responsible" for the bombings.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONSERVATIVE BOURGEOISIE.

For a responsible newspaper still calling itself Republican to carry the calumniation of a class to such a point was possible only because the Conservative middle classes in France were rapidly moving nearer to Fascism. Their choice was already made; they preferred Fascism, even a Fascism based on foreign support, to democracy under Socialist government. Democracy and Republicanism had been acceptable, so long as the privileges of capitalist concentration were not seriously threatened. But when the electors persisted in electing Socialists and advanced democrats, they could no longer put up with it and went over to the side of Fascism. That, of course, is not to say that the journalists of the *Temps* said as much in black and white, or that the leaders of French capitalism were all hand in glove with the Fascists. Nevertheless, most of them had come to look upon it as the lesser evil, and some even provided fat subsidies for the organisation which the Fascists were preparing for civil war. Under the Popular Front Government, it was not uncommon to hear French bourgeois proclaiming in all seriousness that they preferred Hitler to Léon Blum.

British Conservatives into whose hands this book may come will perhaps accuse me of bias. The truth is that they have never suspected the depth of the abyss that separates them from their French counterparts. The great majority of British Conservatives are conservative in the literal sense of the word, but without being simply reactionary. They are attached to Parliamentary institutions; they respect the expression of popular will through the ballot-box, they claim to be profoundly attached to democracy. Above all, they put the interest of their country above that of their class. And if it is true that, some thirty years ago, the majority of French Conservatives also could rightly be regarded as accepting democratic ideas and the principles of the Revolution of 1789, this has ceased to be true in recent years. The greater part of the men of the Right and Centre in France were not only Conservatives, they were reaction-

aries, bitterly opposed to any social progress, ardent defenders of every article of the law that seemed to protect the rights of private property, always ready to fight against any encroachment of the State on private rights or against any innovation in the sphere of social legislation.

And on top of all this, they were supremely stupid. Taken all in all, the Republic had not treated them badly. Those Radicals who liked to call themselves the heirs of the Jacobins could not be accused of excessive severity in their attitude to the magnates of industry and finance, to the "two hundred families" of whom Daladier spoke so often in the days when he called himself the most Jacobin of the Radicals. Even the Popular Front produced no laws fundamentally changing the structure of society; most of its reforms were those regarded as necessary and inevitable by all intelligent people. A few days before Léon Blum took office, an English statesman went to see Pierre Etienne Flandin. Later an admirer of Hitler, Flandin at that time was a Conservative Republican in no way attracted by Fascism, and he explained to his English friend that France was in need of a certain number of reforms that only the Socialists could carry out. What, in any case, had the Conservatives to fear from the régime established by the Constitution of 1875? France has never had a reform of her House of Lords. The Senate, elected on a restricted suffrage, could defeat the Chamber elected by full manhood suffrage, and never hesitated to do so. A Republican body, attached to democratic forms, it has sometimes made life hard for Governments supported by a reactionary Chamber of Deputies. At any rate, it did so up to a few years ago, for during the last five or six years it has been influenced by the changing attitude of the upper and middle bourgeoisie, whom it really represents, and its Republican sentiments have weakened. Yet even in the days when it was most anxious to defend democratic institutions, it remained obstinately opposed to all forms of social innovation. It was the champion of financial orthodoxy, the apostle of budgetary deflation, the guardian of private property. I cannot forget how, at the request of its own Civil Legislation Commission, it amended the Rent Acts passed by the reactionary Bloc National Chamber

(the Chamber produced by the khaki elections of 1919), on the ground that they were too favourable to the tenants! And who does not remember how it defeated the Herriot Government in 1925, and the two Blum Ministries in 1937 and 1938?

Truly, the leaders of French capitalism might reasonably have felt able to sleep in peace. So long as the Senate remained, with its prerogatives intact, Bolshevism had no hope of occupying the chief offices of the State. The de Wendels of the Briey ironfields, the Schneiders of the Creusot armaments works, could have continued to thrive under the Republic. Yet the fact is that not only the big industrialists and financiers, but likewise the middle strata of the bourgeoisie, were ceasing to be Republican. There were, of course, among these classes isolated centres of resistance. Among intellectuals of our University circles, for example, Republican traditions remained active, while some Catholic circles had among them courageous anti-Fascists. But in general the poison was rapidly spreading and soon began to infect the whole organism.

## Louis Marin and the Republican Federation

All this became very clear to me as early as April, 1935, during the annual congress of the Republican Federation, at which I was present in my capacity of journalist. The Republican Federation is the French Conservative party *par excellence.* Its deputies sit on the Right of the Chamber, and their President was Louis Marin, a typical representative of the traditional French Conservatism, hostile to trade unions and a stubborn defender of private property. A patriot with something of the flag-wagging type, he was, like many Lorrainers, inclined to look upon Germany as the hereditary enemy and to distrust her at all times, whatever her political régime might be. Yet with all this he was a Parliamentarian to the backbone, loyal to the Constitution, deeply attached to the Parliamentary régime and a stickler for the proper observance of its forms. To understand properly how completely his life was bound up with Parliamentary forms, one had to see him leaping from his seat in

the Chamber, his moustache bristling pugnaciously, in order to bark out a violent protest against some violation of the rules of procedure.

I was astonished, therefore, to find that inside the Republican Federation Louis Marin was not so much a leader as a sort of mascot. Gratitude for his past services was genuine enough, but he occupied in the minds and hearts of his followers a position more analagous to that of regimental standard than of Colonel; he was respected as a symbol rather than as an active leader. And the men of forty or fifty who spoke at the congress used a language very different from his. There was Philippe Henriot, demagogue and orator, a Fascist if ever there was one. There was Xavier Vallat, an eloquent and cultured lawyer, who had begun his career in the *Action Française* and was still with it at heart. Both made ultra-Fascist speeches, attacked the Franco-Soviet pact as the worst of all possible evils, and were loud in praise of Mussolini. All this while Marin continued to make the speeches one expects from a Conservative whose aim is to preserve both private property and the democratic system, whose patriotism sees only the German danger and whose reaction to the Franco-Soviet pact was, "I would rather have Russia on our side than with the Huns!" In reality, Henriot and Vallat must have terrified Marin as the neo-Socialists, Déat and Marquet, had "terrified" Blum, two years earlier.

Similarly, if one looked carefully at the middle sections of the French bourgeoisie, it soon became clear that profound changes had taken place within it since 1914. Its most typical representatives were disappearing one after another. The cultured country doctor, brought up on liberal ideas, who would fill in the interval between his surgery hours and his visiting times by walking up and down his garden reading Horace, the provincial lawyer with his mutton-chop whiskers and courteous manners, accustomed to listening patiently to the confidences of his clients, appreciative of the bouquet of a bottle of Clos Vougeot from the family cellars or of the binding of some rare volume from the family library—these had gone for ever.

The young doctor or the young lawyer of 1940 had as often as not only one interest, the making of money. They wasted no time either in their gardens or in their libraries. They had no time for culture, despised liberalism as a mass of out-of-date nonsense, talked largely of order and authority and thought of Mussolini as a great man who had made trains run to time. The lawyer read the *Jour*, the doctor the *Action Française*.

Another type well known in Paris was the young business man whom the end of the last war had found in his late twenties, who had no use for either ideas or ideals and whose sole aim when he got back to civilian life was to make up for lost time. Or there were the sons of butchers and bakers, who had sold out the family business at the right time, and gone in for big business, the garage proprietor who had learned to count in fivers where formerly he thought in terms of shillings, the City man who had made an easy fortune while Royal Dutch were on the up grade. All these were built on the same model. Fairly well dressed, with perhaps a dash of the sportsman, they used the same catch phrases, the same fashionable clichés. They filled the fashionable restaurants in the hope of being seen in the company of the latest fashionable figure, and were regular customers of the expensive bars of the Champs-Elysées, where they ruined their palates with perpetual cocktails. Yet they liked to boast of their taste in food and were always discovering nice little pubs that nobody else knew, and where their presence automatically sent up the prices. The ideal of the men of this class was a Packard racer, of their women a mink coat. They thought themselves witty because they laughed at the sallies of Sacha Guitry. They read *Gringoire* every week. They hated Socialists, capable of seeking to transform a society that gave them so many opportunities of having a good time. They regarded M.P.'s as corrupt gas-bags, and admired the dictators who, as their newspapers told them, knew how to deal with unruly elements. They wanted peace, peace in which to enjoy the good things that life was giving them, and they accused the Left of dragging the country into a war against Hitler and Mussolini, with whom it would

have been so nice and so easy to come to a friendly arrangement.

The evocation of all these varied types of bourgeois humanity as they appear in rapid succession in my mind's eye is not a waste of time. To understand them is to understand something of the drift towards Fascism and capitulation in France.

## 3. FASCIST INFLUENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY

The weapon most successfully used by the French Fascists in their fight against the Popular Front was foreign policy. Exercising a strong influence through the Press, they did their best to prevent an international anti-Fascist policy, and successfully prevented the Left Governments from pursuing one. This served a double purpose. While assisting the plans of their foreign masters, they were also working for the disintegration of the Popular Front; by their success in getting their so-called pacifist ideas accepted by the more moderate elements of the Popular Front, they succeeded in detaching the more advanced ones. If the Government had adopted a resolutely anti-Fascist policy, the whole of the working and lower middle classes would have remained faithful to it. If the Popular Front had remained a solid block, the Senate would not have dared a frontal attack on it. But the Blum Government, subject of necessity to pressure from the Radicals, who in their turn were unconsciously under the influence of the reactionary and Fascist bourgeoisie, did not pursue the foreign policy expected of it by the masses of the people.

### A Great Disappointment.

When the Government under Socialist leadership came into power, a great hope was born in France and in the world. Pierre Laval had piled disaster upon disaster. The Italo-Abyssinian affair is beginning to be forgotten, but

its importance cannot be overestimated. By bringing to nought the sanctions policy, Laval destroyed the collective security system, and thus encouraged Hitler to reoccupy the Rhineland on March 7th, 1936. Those who followed this dramatic conflict day by day can testify to the anxiety with which the announcement of the sanctions policy was received by the Nazi journalists at Geneva. It was because sanctions had been abandoned that Hitler knew he could violate the Locarno pact with impunity. Thanks to the policy of Laval, the whole system of organised peace received a mortal blow, and the decline of the League began. As for France, March 7th, logical consequence of the Abyssinian affair, lost her the confidence of central and eastern Europe and opened the road to the pan-German push of Hitlerism. To all of which must be added that the policy of Laval created a gulf between France and England, and secondly that the result of the Italo-Abyssinian affair in home politics was to change the traditional policy of the Right and the French Conservatives : from this time onwards they gave full rein to their class passions. They forgot that collective security had been the policy of all French Governments since the armistice. When they sacrificed it to their love for Mussolini, they sacrificed with it the interests of France. There is no need to pursue the theme. Memories of all this are still present in everyone's mind, and the pro-Italian and anti-British articles of the French Press, in particular the Henri Béraud article in *Gringoire*, entitled " Must England be Reduced to Slavery ? " are only too well remembered.

But with the coming of the Popular Front the engines appeared to have been reversed. The policies of Laval and of February 6th were condemned by the electorate. At last we were to try a different road. The majority of Frenchmen hoped for it, as did the friends of France throughout the world. Both were doomed to be disappointed.

On one point, it must be admitted, Léon Blum did much to repair the damage done by " Lavalism." He made agreement with Great Britain the basis of his foreign policy. One might even say that at times his desire to strengthen

Franco-British friendship, necessary though that friendship was, led him to model his policy much too closely on that of the Foreign Office. But that is another story. . . . What stands out in the account of his foreign policy is that, for reasons not his own, Blum felt compelled to pursue, or to allow his Foreign Minister, Delbos, to pursue a foreign policy very different from the vigorous anti-Fascist policy expected of him. Proof of this was supplied immediately by the Spanish affair.

I shall explain in a later chapter how unjustly Léon Blum has been condemned on account of the non-intervention policy, and how in fact this policy was imposed upon him. The fact remains, however, that for various reasons the Fascists and the Right, the opponents of help for Spain, had their way in this matter less than two months after the Popular Front Government took office. It was the first defeat, with the heaviest consequences.

The Fascists became bolder. And since their campaign against "ideological struggles" was carried on under a mask of pacifism, they succeeded in carrying with them not only many Conservatives, but also some of the Radicals. "No ideological struggles," said the Senate. "No ideological struggles," repeated the Radical leaders, stupidly, and they were supported by some of the Socialists who were later to become Munichites. And poor Yvon Delbos, who since Munich and even recently, at the time of the capitulation, has shown a courage equal to his honesty, which is unquestionable, Yvon Delbos, instead of standing up to the Fascists and the half-wits who took up their refrain, joined in the chorus himself. He denied any intention of permitting internal ideological struggles to be reproduced in the field of foreign policy and affirmed that the Government, resisting the temptation to pursue an anti-Fascist foreign policy, was prepared to work in friendly collaboration with all other countries. This at a time when foreign Fascist movements were in control of French Fascism and while the latter was faithfully fulfilling the plans of foreign Fascisms was criminal folly.

Examples of this policy of collaboration are only too numerous. It must suffice here to mention the negotiations

with Dr. Schacht, the Dr. Schacht who, it was said, was opposed to Hitler in his heart of hearts, but who nevertheless followed up his conversations with the Socialist Ministers by a visit to the Paris Nazi colony in their Brown House in the rue Roquépine. For the Government never attempted to close this hot-bed of Nazi espionage installed in the capital itself. If the Minister of the Interior had ventured to propose such a thing, the Foreign Minister would immediately have protested.

It must, on the other hand, be pointed out that there were occasional bursts of energy which, as was to be expected, had the happiest results. When in January, 1937, the Government warned Hitler that it would not tolerate a German landing in Spanish Morocco, the Germans hastily withdrew and loudly protested their good intentions, though in fact their preparations were far advanced. It must be noted, too, that the second Blum Government, in which Paul Boncour was Foreign Minister, began, in March, 1938 a vigorous attempt to reconstruct the network of French alliances in Eastern and Central Europe, and that it seemed at last resolved to follow the right road and treat both German Nazism and Fascism as enemies. But at this stage the Popular Front had lost much of its strength in the country, and the Senate did not hesitate to defeat the Government.

With Daladier came a return to the most unfortunate errors, all becoming steadily more serious, until the mortal blunder was committed. The intention to resist shown by Daladier in April, 1938, when he defended the cause of Czechoslovakia in London, was followed by countless failures. Gradually he allowed Georges Bonnet to drag us into a policy of surrender that ended by becoming a policy of treachery. In July, control of the Pyrenean frontier was re-established and the Spanish Republic thus effectively strangled; in August, preparations were made to hand over Czechoslovakia. And on September 29th, Daladier went to Munich to sign the peace that was no peace, from which the present horrors were to spring.

BONNET AND MUNICH.

A word must be said about Munich. The subject has been so thoroughly explored by so many different writers that there is no longer any need to prove that France and Great Britain were the victims of a gigantic bluff. To those who claim that Munich at least saved us from war at that time, it is easy to reply that even if war had come in 1938 it would have come in circumstances very different from those of 1939, with the Czechoslovak bastion on our side, without the Russo-German agreement and with an enemy much less well prepared than was the Germany of 1939. And in fact that argument in itself suffices to prove that there was no real danger of war at the time of Munich. What we know now of the balance of military strengths, Hitler then knew much better. This so-called mystic is in fact a stern realist. And his agent in France, Abetz, unblushingly confessed, a few weeks later, that on the evening of September 28th the Fuhrer "was at his wits' end" to know what to do in the face of Anglo-French resistance.

Munich, however, must be discussed here from a purely French point of view.[1] My readers will understand my scruples if, as a guest enjoying the generous hospitality of this country, I refuse to pass judgment in any way upon its politicians. I may perhaps be permitted to say that Mr. Chamberlain's policy was not one that would have commanded my support, but to this must be added the admission that in the Munich affair the French and British Governments do not bear an equal responsibility. Great Britain was not the ally of Czechoslovakia, as was France. The worst reproach that can be addressed to the British Government is that of blindness, while the unchanging motive force behind the policy and actions of Bonnet was dishonesty. Rarely has any French statesman been char-

[1] All the following details have appeared in the course of the years 1938–39 in *L'Europe Nouvelle*, a weekly review of foreign policy; most of them were presented ironically under the signature *le Guet d'Orsay*, which, it may now be admitted, was one of my pseudonyms.

acterised by such complete lack of scruple. Lies came to him so naturally that it is doubtful if he knew he was lying. "If you tell lies," grandmothers used to say to their grandchildren, "You'll have a long nose." But unfortunately, as a writer in *L'Europe Nouvelle* remarked, with his mind on Bonnet's most prominent feature, some noses are so long already that lying can't make them any worse.

Georges Bonnet is a Radical. The whole of his career has been spent in the Radical Party. He is a cultured and hard-working man, with a wide knowledge of economic problems. But he is consumed with ambition; he cannot endure not being in the Government. If ever he is left out, he intrigues perpetually against the Prime Minister who has tried to do without his services. And Prime Ministers who find him a Ministerial office are no safer than those who do not, for he intrigues no less from inside than from outside the Cabinet.

In order to make his career more certain, he took up long ago with financiers and bankers, went wholly over to their side and has become under their direction a leading defender of financial orthodoxy. By degrees he became also the defender of their foreign policy. He is, moreover, afraid of war and of accepting responsibility for it. It was therefore natural that he should find in protestations of pacifism a convenient mask for his ill-concealed sympathy for Fascism, with which he was determined at any cost to reach an agreement.

In the days that preceded Munich, his duplicity showed itself in his dealings with his own countrymen and with Great Britain, as well as in those with Czechoslovakia.

### Duplicity Towards France.

In his dealings with the French, his tactic was always to cast doubt on the honesty and good faith of Great Britain, to seek to create the impression that in no circumstances would her armies march. A few examples will show how this was done.

On August 24th it was announced in London that Mr.

Chamberlain, Lord Halifax and Sir John Simon were to make a declaration equivalent to a warning to the Nazis before their Congress at Nüremberg. The *Daily Mail* published a forecast of the general lines of the declaration; the British Ministers, it said, were to indicate that Great Britain would be by the side of France, if the latter were to find herself at war in pursuance of her engagements towards Czechoslovakia. And, in fact, a declaration in this sense was made in Sir John Simon's speech at Lanark on August 27th. On the evening of the 25th the German official news agency, the D.N.B., published a telegram from London claiming authority from "official sources" to deny the news of any such coming declaration. At the same hour, a semi-official Havas telegram, inspired by Bonnet, corroborated the lying German denial; this telegram explained that "well-informed circles were rather surprised by the news published this morning by the English press," and there followed this phrase: "To-day M. Georges Bonnet was in telephonic communication with the French chargé d'affaires in London, M. Roger Cambon, who had met Lord Halifax this morning. The Minister for Foreign Affairs was able to obtain no confirmation of this rumour, which would appear to be inexact."

On September 11th, on the eve of Hitler's speech at Nüremberg, a solemn warning was given to the Führer. Mr. Chamberlain received British journalists, while a Foreign Office official received the representatives of the foreign press, and at both meetings it was explained that if France went to war, Great Britain would be compelled to do the same. The declaration was one of vital importance, signifying, as it did, that this time Great Britain was not making the mistake of 1914; she was giving Germany clear warning of her intentions. But Bonnet was watching the situation. One of his officials was instructed to telephone the diplomatic correspondents of the French press that evening, instructing them to minimise the importance of the declaration. One of those correspondents was the author of this book.

On the 26th, after Godesberg, Daladier and Bonnet came to London. The French Premier, who for the moment was

inclined to take a firm line, had quarrelled with his Foreign Minister and was suspicious of him. He went alone to see Mr. Chamberlain, leaving Bonnet with Lord Halifax. But that did not prevent Bonnet from declaring at the Cabinet meeting on the 27th, in Paris, that France could not count on British help. And Daladier was compelled to interrupt him and ask pointedly, " What do *you* know of it, since you were not there ? "

Finally, it may be remembered that the journalists under the orders of Bonnet were instructed to publish articles casting doubt on the Foreign Office declaration of September 26th, to the effect that if, in spite of all efforts, Czechoslovakia became the object of German aggression, " the immediate consequence would be that France would feel obliged to come to her aid and that Great Britain and Russia would certainly find themselves by the side of France." In the same way, they had been instructed to treat with irony the declaration of Litvinov at Geneva, in which he said that Russia would come to the assistance of Czechoslovakia, on condition that France fulfilled her pledges, carefully passing over the fact that the Russo-Czech pact itself made Russian assistance dependent on that of France, and that the clause to this effect had been inserted at the request of the Czechs themselves, so that they should not be accused of allying themselves with Bolshevism.

### Duplicity Towards Great Britain.

There was another side to the manœuvre. While France was being persuaded that England would not fight with her, England was to be led to believe that France was seeking to avoid a conflict, that she was not in a position to fight, that her military resources were insufficient for the task. This was the tenor of frequent talks with the British Ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps. In addition, Bonnet made use of a report by General Gamelin, of which the first part spoke of the weakness of the French Air Force, while the second gave satisfactory information about the army, the

whole concluding on a reassuring note. In his conversations, Bonnet omitted all reference to this second part, confining himself wholly to insistence on the first.

On September 26th, while Daladier was in conference with Mr. Chamberlain, in the presence of the chief official of the French Foreign Office, M. Alexis Léger, of Sir Thomas Inskip and of our Ambassador, M. Corbin, General Gamelin gave an exposé of the situation. He made no attempt to hide the weak points, but showed that the German air superiority was not sufficient to give them victory. He gave encouraging information about the value of the Czech army, and spoke of the weaknesses of the Siegfried Line (for it must not be forgotten that we were then in 1938, not in 1940 or even 1939). While Gamelin was speaking, Bonnet was in conversation with Lord Halifax, giving him, *after his own fashion*, a résumé of the Gamelin report.

### Pressure on Czechoslovakia.

Part III: while he was busy deceiving both French and English, Bonnet was bringing to bear on our Czech allies a ceaseless and wholly unjustifiable pressure. As early as July, in his instructions to our Minister in Prague, M. Lacroix, he asked him to make clear to the Czech Government that France could not march to her assistance if England were not by her side.

On September 20th, it became necessary to compel the Prague Government to accept the dismemberment decided upon in London. Both France and Britain pressed hard. M. Lacroix officially informed the Czech Government that if they did not accept the London agreement, France could give no military aid to her ally. Worse still, when compelled to yield, the Prague Cabinet announced its decision in a communiqué in which it spoke of the "irresistible pressure" from France and Great Britain, an American agency published the communiqué, and M. Bonnet compelled the Czech Government to withdraw it.

THE MUNICH MENTALITY.

There is no need to go on with these examples. The case, I imagine, is judged. But now that it has been shown how Bonnet preceded Baudouin and his friends on the path of treason, a word must be said about the Munich mentality that was created and cleverly fostered by French Fascism.

During the month of September, Bonnet found valuable helpers, whom Fascism and reaction were able to provide for him from all kinds of circles. Some acted in full consciousness that their mission was to serve a Fascist plan, to which a policy of resistance, with the democratic victory that must follow, was a serious obstacle. Others were moved simply by their love of peace, while there was a third section in whom the desire to avoid war mingled with an instinct to safeguard the interests of their class.

Within the Government itself, Bonnet had active lieutenants. Among those who worked with him to prepare the capitulation, who, in the course of nocturnal interviews at the Quai d'Orsay, worked out with him the most complicated manœuvres was the ingenious and somewhat ludicrous Anatole de Monzie, who succeeded in admiring at one and the same time the Soviet régime and Mussolini's Fascism, and who, as a friend of Hungary, looked upon the Czechs as personal enemies. There was Pomaret, Minister of Labour, who was later to be one of Pétain's Ministers for a few days. Bonnet also had good friends in Parliament; there was Jean Mistler, President of the Foreign Affairs Commission, officially a Radical, but at heart a reactionary, or the unstable Gaston Bergery, another of those who were found on the side of Germany after the defeat, but one who had not waited for defeat to serve German interests. And more, many more. Bonnet used anything and anybody that could be made to help. He had auxiliaries among the Socialists and Trade Unionists, of whom something will be said in the next chapter, whose task was to foster pacifism among the working class and even to attack the military measures decided upon by the Government. Those who were later to become the " Munichites "

used all possible means to influence public opinion. They made use not only of the press, but also of posters, and the ultra-pacifist posters of the Trade Unionists were not very different from those prepared by the friends of M. Flandin.

### Flandin.

The most characteristic representative of the Munich mentality is Pierre Etienne Flandin. His career is indeed an epitome of the evolution of the French bourgeoisie towards Fascism. In his early days, he was wholly Republican. His father was a "moderate" politician, who could not conceive of any politican institutions other than the democratic. Flandin was leader of the one of the Centre parties, the Democratic Republican Alliance. Inside this group, he had always opposed those who advocated Right and Right-Centre Ministries, his own desire being always for an alliance between the Centre and the Radicals. His own Government, coming at the end of 1934 and the beginning of 1935, after that of Doumergue, was regarded as a Government of reconciliation, and the Fascists opposed it. Foreign Minister in the Sarraut Cabinet of 1936, he was the typical Left-Centre Deputy, always speaking in terms of opposition to Fascism. Although, as successor to Laval, he failed to break with the latter's pro-Italian policy, he had nothing good to say in private of the Italian Fascists. "*Ils me dégoûtent*," "They make me sick," such literally, was the expression he used in a conversation at Geneva, in which he tried to explain to me that he was compelled to deal gently with Mussolini, for fear of Hitler.

On March 7th he was not among the Ministers most resolutely in favour of energetic measures in reply to the reoccupation of the Rhineland, but neither was he among the defeatists. During the negotiations in London which followed the Rhineland coup, and in the course of which he secured an alliance with England, he said and did nothing that might have led one to see in him the future supporter of Hitler. It was he, moreover, in an excellent speech in the

Chamber, who defended the ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact.

Yet, during the first months of the Blum Government class feeling seemed to come to the surface in this rather disdainful, sometimes arrogant bourgeois with his clear and penetrating mind and ordered and lucid speech. This remarkably cool debater, who would gather himself for the spring like a great beast of prey, and then strike down his opponent in a single crushing phrase, became one of the principal mouthpieces of the opposition. Foreign policy was the principal field of his attack, and here he defended the idea of agreement with Italy and the strict non-intervention which was the best service we could render to Franco. As his desire for power grew, he became increasingly aggressive against the Popular Front and increasingly favourable to Mussolini. And as was inevitable, after having sought or pretended to seek agreement with Mussolini against Hitler, he soon became an advocate of the idea of agreement with both Mussolini *and* Hitler. At the beginning of 1938 he set out on a rather surprising trip to Berlin. As soon as the Czechoslovak crisis opened he took up the attack, and the German point of view found from then on no more fervent advocate. And when, after Munich he sent his now notorious congratulatory telegram to Hitler, it was difficult to avoid the impression that he saw himself as the future Seyss-Inquart of France.

Such is the story of what class feeling can do to a Conservative and democratic upper middle class mind. His evolution from 1936 onwards, from the position of a man who was rather proud of his anglophile sentiments and tried deliberately to model himself on the British Conservatives, is indeed typical. Yet my explanation of his position is incomplete, in that I have seen it so far only in terms of the interplay of ideas, evolving as a function of class interests. It therefore does not provide all the facts that we need to understand the case of Flandin, who, it must always be remembered, was a big-business lawyer with a well-established reputation and many and varied contacts with the world of high finance.

### The Conquering Heroes.

Perhaps the most revealing pictures are those presented by the Flandins and the Mistlers immediately before and immediately after Munich, surrounded by their mob of Parliamentary defeatists, with its fringe of sincere but stupid pacifists. Public opinion had by now been so carefully manipulated that people genuinely believed they had narrowly escaped a mortal danger and that Munich was the beginning of an era of real peace.

When the Prime Minister's 'plane was approaching the Le Bourget aerodrome on September 30th, Daladier looked down and saw the crowd waiting for him to land. He was morose and ill-tempered. "They're waiting to throw rotten eggs at me," he said to his companions, and then to his own astonishment he was received like a conquering hero, with cheers and bouquets and songs of praise. He was quick to adapt himself to the situation. I saw him at the corner of the rue Lafayette and the Boulevard Haussmann, standing up in his car, and he seemed to be taking this unexpected part perfectly seriously. But when he reached the War Ministry, he came down again to earth and sat down sadly at his desk. Cheers were still ringing beneath his window, but de Monzie had the greatest difficulty in getting him out on to the balcony. When he at last consented to go out he was heard to mutter as he went, "If only these idiots knew what they were cheering!" And he went on to describe the crowd in less printable language. Yet the very next day he again agreed to play the conquering hero, and went to lay a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier. Bonnet was exultant; he wanted to have the bells of Notre-Dame rung, as in 1918, but Cardinal Verdier refused. This high-minded prelate could not bring himself to look upon the mutilation of one of the proudest democracies in Europe and the triumph of naked force as an occasion for rejoicing.

The Munichites were triumphant, and treated their opponents as war-mongers. All parties were split, so that old distinctions lost their importance and only that between Munichites and anti-Munichites counted. The former were

so conscious of their triumph that they thought of forming a purely "pacifist" Ministry. Bonnet did his best to encourage them. As he was sure that he would himself be Prime Minister, he had already begun to choose his Ministers, and had in mind a Cabinet extending from Ybarnégaray on its right wing to the Trade Union leader, René Belin, on its left. Bonnet's mind was running a little ahead of events, for these two Munichites were in fact to be members of the same Cabinet two years later. But it needed the defeat and occupation of France by Nazi Germany to bring it about.

It is impossible to think of the days that followed Munich without a feeling of intense sadness and disgust. How can one remember without shame that some Socialists and Trade Unionists were among the noisiest in their acclamations? Or that when Mr. Chamberlain came to Paris a few weeks later, "pacifist" women cheered and threw flowers at him? In the cruel times in which we live, English Socialists are fortunate in one thing at least: they can reflect that during the Munich crisis, *their* honour remained intact.

## 4. THE FIFTH COLUMN AT WORK

It remains for us to cast a glance at the propaganda of French Fascism and its links with that of foreign Fascism. In other words, and to make use of an expression that has now passed into the language, we must look at the work of the fifth column.

It is said that the fifth column did wonderful work in Holland and Belgium, but I doubt whether it obtained anywhere better results than in France. Hitler's agents in France showed infinite ability and variety, as well as an acute understanding of French psychology. The principal stage manager of the whole affair was Abetz, a specialist in propaganda for France, where he had been a frequent visitor, who was able to play with extraordinary virtuosity on the snobbishness of the governing classes and the pacifism of the working classes.

### The Pro-German Circles.

The salons of Paris, aristocratic salons or new-rich bourgeois salons, have a great influence on politicians and men of letters ; Abetz and his satellites were able to use a certain number of them that had been brought over without difficulty to Nazi propaganda. Paris was full of pacifist groups, of "spontaneous" advocates of Franco-German *rapprochement*. At the time of the signature of the disgraceful Franco-German declaration of December 6th and of Ribbentrop's journey to Paris, the French germanophiles thought themselves on top of the world and no longer attempted to hide their most secret thoughts. In one of the "super-Munichite" salons, Bonnet explained with complete frankness the real meaning of Munich: Germany, he proclaimed, must be given a free hand in the East. All of which suggests that Ribbentrop's statements in the French Yellow Book are not devoid of truth. Why should Bonnet have spoken differently to Hitler's Foreign Minister from what he did in the salons of Paris ? He even went so far as to say one day to an astonished Deputy that Germany would get back all that she had lost in 1918, an affirmation that may well be compared with that of Flandin after the occupation of Prague on March 15th, in which he said that the occupation was inevitable and there was more to come yet !

The catch-phrase about a free hand for Germany in the East had as its necessary corollary a concentration by France on her own Empire. The idea, first put about by Fascists, had reached Daladier by way of Bonnet and Flandin. "Let us leave Hitler a free hand, and think of our own Empire," people repeated almost monotonously in the salons and in the lobbies of the Chamber. But that did not prevent Bonnet from trying to sacrifice the integrity of this Empire by sending Paul Baudouin to Rome to negotiate the surrender of part of it.

But to return to Abetz and the salons. Among the frequenters of these places were men of letters, as well as the usual politicians and social lions. It was child's play

for Hitler's agent and his assistants to secure the services of the former group; all that was needed was the offer of ultra-generous contracts. Second-rate writers, whose works sold in France by the score or the hundred, received offers to buy their works for Germany at prices implying a sale of hundreds of thousands. Some accepted on the ground that one man's money was as good as another's, others out of stupid vanity; they never suspected that they were being bribed, but genuinely believed that they were being appreciated at their true value for the first time.

FERNAND DE BRINON.

The chief French agent of Abetz, or at any rate the cleverest, was Fernand de Brinon, now Ambassador of the Vichy Government in Paris. De Brinon is a journalist who lacks neither intelligence nor skill in handling men. A scion of the minor nobility, his ambition is of correspondingly major order. For years he had aspired to the rôle of *éminence grise*. A discovery of André Tardieu round about 1930, he was also on good terms with Daladier and often tried to bring the two men together. But it was to foreign policy that he was soon to give the greater part of his activity. As diplomatic correspondent of the *Information*, a paper owned by the Lazard Bank, he undertook frequent trips to Germany in search of information. As soon as Hitler came to power, he saw the possibility of his playing an important part. He got himself into the good graces of the Nazis and became a friend of Ribbentrop at a time when practically every French journalist looked upon the Third Reich with horror. He was the first French journalist to secure an interview with Hitler, which appeared simultaneously in the *Matin* and the *Information*. He soon became the recognised link between the new Germany and the French financiers and politicians. He paid frequent visits to Berlin, where he was received as a distinguished guest by the leading figures of the régime. In France, he was on excellent terms with Laval and Bonnet. Under Yvon Delbos and Paul-Boncour the Quai d'Orsay was closed to him, but Bonnet opened its

doors again to him, and sent him on a secret mission to Berlin during the winter of 1939. He even wanted to offer him an ambassadorial post, but encountered opposition such that he was compelled to abandon the idea. It is only in a France enslaved to Germany that de Brinon has at last got himself an ambassadorship.

Failing official appointments, however, de Brinon was often able to have himself sent on special missions. One of these days it will undoubtedly be possible to prove that *his rôle in French foreign policy was the vital one*. It is already certain that his relations with a large number of French politicians made of him a first class Nazi agent. In constant contact with Abetz[1], he was one of the key men of the *Comité France-Allemagne*, which, under the pretence of promoting cultural relations between the two countries, carried on active propaganda for Nazi Germany. Closely connected with this Committee was a Franco-German club, the *Grand Pavois*, frequented by the leaders of the cagoulards, by germanophile journalists like Fontenoy and Jean Luchaire, now the editors of German-controlled newspapers printed in French, and by a few simple souls whose germanophile sentiments were a product of their pacifism, like the reactionary Deputy, Scapini, who had been blinded in the last war.

The writings of Fernand de Brinon are worthy of close examination. They throw a vivid light on the subtle and perfidious methods of Nazi propaganda. The first interview with Hitler is a masterpiece of its kind. Everything in it is intended to suggest to the French public that Hitler is not only pacific, but faithful to his word. Here, for example, is one of the Führer's phrases, picked at random from this article. "I alone decide on German policy, and when I give my word, I am in the habit of keeping it."

### Edifying Extracts.

Shortly after the appearance of this sensational interview, de Brinon published a book, *France and Germany*,

[1] Abetz and de Brinon were in close contact with a number of autonomist newspapers in Alsace-Lorraine; de Brinon, indeed, owned an Alsatian paper with no readers, whose sole aim was to be quoted by the German wireless.

1918–1934, of which one or two extracts may perhaps profitably be quoted here. Here, for instance, is a passage on the prestige and popularity of the Führer, who is compared, in all seriousness, with Joan of Arc:

> " How can one explain his prestige and authority? It is said that he is a simple and direct soul, and some have compared him with Joan of Arc. But it is not only over the masses that his remarkable hold is exercised. Hitler recruits his followers among all classes of German society; he has converted supporters of the old régime, who at one time would gladly have ordered the Reichswehr to fire on him."

De Brinon defends Hitler against the reproach of ignorance, and then goes on to protest against the legend of his cruelty. Here is a passage worth savouring:

> " He is often presented as a bloody monster, and when the High Court of Leipzig acquitted the defendants who had been brought before it on a political charge, this was presented as a victory for world opinion. *But Hitler has always detested the shedding of blood.* When Count Helldorf, at the head of his S.A. men, was becoming impatient in November, 1932, at not receiving the order to march on Berlin, Hitler replied, 'No, not a drop of blood that we can avoid shedding. Power will be mine inevitably.' And indeed so it was that power came to him. What a difference between the massacres of the Bolshevik revolution, and the repressions of Hitler's! He can go on foot through the streets of German towns, take his seat in the Munich Opera House among the rest of the audience. He did not, as he himself says, inherit his throne, he was Chosen."

How touching it all is! Even more so is de Brinon's praise of the disinterestedness of Hitler, which follows. And here is another extract, in which we find Hitler meditating in the solitude of Berchtesgaden over the method of bringing about a reconciliation between France and Germany:

> " The mountain chalet of Berchtesgaden, to which he goes to rest every week-end in company with his sister

and his secretaries, and where he often invites his friends, was presented to him, together with a few acres of ground, by the local municipality. There, amid the vivifying and salty air of the Bavarian mountains, he looks out from his balcony over Austria, his native land, with the towers of Salzburg in the valley beneath. From the early hours of every day, and on until nightfall, the inhabitants of the neighbouring districts come on pilgrimages to the foot of the château in the hope of catching a glimpse of the object of their adoration.

"It was here that Hitler thought out his settlement with France. Long before he became Chancellor, he dreamed, as he has told me, as he has told M. François Poncet, of becoming the man who should reconcile the two peoples with a mutual respect for and guarantee of their national honour."

THE PRESS AND FASCIST PROPAGANDA.

Volumes could be written about the activities of the fifth column in France. The weekly paper, *La Lumière*, has published some fascinating revelations on the skilful way in which the propaganda was prepared, how the work was divided between the different branches and so on. Here, however, our purpose is merely to show in the most summary fashion how Fascist propaganda tried to establish contact with the different classes of French society.

After the propaganda of the salons and the propaganda for the consumption of "intellectuals," both of which were addressed only to a very limited circle, came the propaganda destined for the masses, or at least for the masses of the French middle classes. This, as will have been understood, was the work of the Press, and it was the greatest of the many successes of Hitler's agents in France.

The French Fascists, the servants of German and Italian Fascism, exercised in fact either direct control or, as a minimum, a direct or indirect influence over the greater part of the daily press. And here I am not thinking only of papers openly hostile to the Republican régime, like the *Action Française* of Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras, or

like the *Jour* of Léon Bailby, but equally of the big, so-called non-party papers, which claimed to be impartial. The *Journal* had become a centre of Fascist intrigues. It belonged to a business man of the name of Guimier, whom Léon Blum had the courage to dismiss from the agency unofficially used by all French Governments, the *Agence Havas*. The *Matin* was even worse. Prior to 1914 it had stirred up hatred of Germany. But since the coming of Nazism, the " hereditary enemy " had acquired a quite new prestige. The proprietor of the *Matin*, the elderly Bunau-Varilla, had been compromised in the Panama scandal and had finally turned his paper into what was practically a Paris edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. His henchman, Stéphane Lauzanne, was instructed to keep up a perpetual attack on Bolshevism and to oppose resistance to Hitlerism.

In general, it is true to say that during the months immediately preceding the war it was very difficult to find in the French Press any references to Nazi atrocities. If one omits the Socialist and Communist papers, a few provincial Radical papers, the *Epoque* of Henri de Kérillis, the *Ordre* of Emile Buré, and one or two weeklies like the *Lumière* and *L'Europe Nouvelle*, the whole French Press behaved as if it had received orders to be gentle with Hitler at all costs. It must, however, be admitted that the *Petit Parisien* did not leave its readers in total ignorance of Nazi barbarism. Though he had been Italophile at the time of the sanctions policy, its editor, Elie J. Bois, never ceased to be anti-Hitler, and his refusal to accept a policy of capitulation in June, 1940, led to his being dismissed by the owners of the paper, the brothers Dupuy.

### The Weekly Press.

On reflection, however, one is compelled to admit that the section of the French Press which best served the interests of Hitler and Mussolini was the weekly papers. During recent years the weeklies have had a great influence in France. The average Frenchman reads fewer and fewer serious books and more and more weekly reviews. These

periodicals, considerable in size, easily read, containing several serial and short stories, full of political gossip, formed the principal intellectual nourishment of the middle bourgeoisie whose decadence has been described above. And practically every weekly with a big circulation was Fascist. *Candide*, the weekly of the publishing house of Fayard, *Gringoire*, the paper of Carbuccia and Chiappe, were both Fascist, to say nothing of *Je suis partout*, which spoke exactly in the terms later to be familiarised by Paul Ferdonnet, the traitor of Radio-Stuttgart, or by Lord Haw-Haw of Zeesen and Bremen, insulting Great Britain, President Roosevelt, the Jews, and so on.

All these papers attacked and sought to discredit Republican statesmen and democratic Ministers. They contrasted what they called " the true France " with the France that expressed its wishes through the ballot-box. The traitors of *Gringoire* went beyond all imaginable bounds. The catchwords of Hitler and Mussolini were shamelessly reprinted ; the Spanish rebels were treated as friends, the Republicans as enemies ; Czechoslovakia was referred to as a Bolshevik country, just as in the German Press ; President Benès, the most faithful friend of France, was dragged through the mud. Everything, in its eyes, went to prove that Soviet Russia was the real enemy, and that the scandalous treaty that bound us to Russia must immediately be denounced. Mussolini was spoken of with admiration and Hitler with sympathy. *The average middle-class reader, the provincial tradesman and rentier, who had formerly been jingo and had shown so little understanding of the Republic of Weimar, were taught to be indulgent towards a Germany fully deserving of French sympathy, now that she had gone Fascist.*

### The Reactionaries and the War.

The war compelled *Gringoire* and its fellows to modify their tone ; they affected the necessary patriotism[1]. But it was not difficult, to use a favourite French expression,

[1] It should, however, be noted that some of the German agents, working with one or two newspapers, continued their work of treachery during the war. Some were arrested, notably Lecat, managing director of *Je Suis Partout*.

to see that their heart was not in it. Moreover, as soon as one was able to exchange a few words with some of the leaders of the Right, or with the journalists who represented their opinions, one was immediately edified. For these people the expression "a phoney war" meant more than just a war that was being fought in strange fashion; it meant a war that was being fought against the wrong country, a war that was not their war. I have heard members of the body of diplomatic correspondents, in private conversation, express views on the origins of the war that were quite simply the official German view; a view, moreover, which, if one is to take at their value the accusations against the prisoners of Riom, is now the official view of the Vichy Government.

If the Fascist and semi-Fascist papers were compelled to assume an appearance of patriotism and to print a certain minimum of anti-German views, Italy, on the other hand, remained the little Latin sister who would some day return to the straight and narrow way. This insane idea, moreover, was shared by many Ministers and politicians who were in no way tainted with Fascism. And on this point one must do the General Staff the justice of admitting that it contained a number of officers who had remained quite sane; as early as September, 1939, they wanted to compel Mussolini to make his choice. These officers feared that if the Italian comedy were prolonged it might lead to real disasters. It was said that General Gamelin, whose view was apparently not shared by General Georges, had been in favour of an offensive against Italy from the very beginning of the war. If this story is true, our judgment of Gamelin's mistakes must perhaps be somewhat modified.

It was the Russo-Finnish War that revealed most clearly the secret thoughts of the journalists and their masters. For weeks they talked of nothing else. Admittedly, the affair was a serious one, and the resistance of a little country against aggression was worthy of praise. But the French Press on this occasion did more than merely try to make its readers forget the war with Germany; it sought to make them wonder if a reversal of the diplomatic situation was not already taking place, if Germany was not about to

take the side of Finland against Russia. And from there to seeking an alliance with Hitler against the U.S.S.R. would have been a very short step.

All these campaigns bore fruit. They poisoned the public mind. I do not, of course, for a moment claim that the whole of the middle strata of the urban bourgeoisie had lost its national feeling. There were in its ranks many honest men who refused to be influenced by German propaganda. I am sure that these men and women received the news of the armistice with tears in their eyes, shaking with rage and filled with hatred of the invader and of those who had surrendered their country to him. I remember a meeting in a train on June 12th, somewhere between Tours and Orléans. I chatted for a long time with an old woman refugee from the Aisne Department, who was fleeing before a German invasion for the third time in her life, having suffered precisely the same fate in 1870 and in 1914. By birth a Parisian, the daughter of a musician at the Opéra, she was now a little old woman, wrinkled and bent with age. But her eye was quick and merry, her speech firm. One felt that one was in the presence of a cool head and a calm will. She spoke good humouredly of her exodus to-day and of her two previous flights. But the idea that defeat might even be possible never crossed her mind. She was going to wait in some quiet corner of the Charente, as she had waited twenty-six years before. It wouldn't be very pleasant, but "one had seen worse things." And, despite her eighty years, she felt quite capable of awaiting patiently a second victory.

### Some Significant Anecdotes.

But when that concession has been made, it must be admitted that the damage was serious. Here are three brief anecdotes in support of this view.

Last winter, in the mess of Divisional H.Q., the conversation turned one night on the need to bring America in on the side of the Allies. A young reserve officer, a well-known writer, the son of a famous author who was far from

being a supporter of the Left, declared in the course of the conversation: "We shall have to send Léon Blum to Washington; he's very popular in the States." Whereupon one of his comrades interrupted: *Vous voulez donc lui refaire une virginité?* was his only comment.

Here is another story. In another officers' mess they were discussing after dinner the attitude they ought to take if by chance a German Air Force officer should fall to them as a prisoner. They were all agreed: he must be invited to dinner; and in the same way they were agreed that if ever a Russian officer should be captured he should *not* receive the same treatment. And in case the reader should feel that this after all was merely a case of a few reactionary young officers, joking after dinner, let him consider this third story.

On the evening of Thursday, June 13th, I was at Tours. In the foyer of a big hotel the guests were listening to the last speech of Paul Reynaud on the wireless. Emotion ran high. At the end of the speech, when the Marseillaise was played, everyone stood up. Women were weeping . . . and we went back to our rooms, talking sadly. One of us tried to say a few words of hope, to say that all was not yet lost, that resistance would go on, that in the end the Russians would drop their German friends. At that point an old gentleman, a Colonel perhaps, or a high Civil Servant in retirement, exploded. "What," he said, "the Russians; to be saved by Russia would be worse than anything!"

It is no part of my function here to pass judgment on the policy of Soviet Russia. She has been guilty of blunders which I feel no inclination to forgive, and I have always sought, as a Socialist, to refute the theoretical concepts of Bolshevism. But that is not the problem. The two last stories I have told are intended only to show how thoroughly the Fascist Press had succeeded in its effort; many honest bourgeois had reached the point where Hitler most wanted to see them; they despised and detested Russia, whose alliance with France was Hitler's bugbear.

The evil went, indeed, very deep. The whole social structure was rotting. Fascist corruption was steadily

gaining ground. The morale of the country was being undermined. Or, to use another metaphor, the worm was attacking the best parts of the fruit, and bringing rot with it.

Abetz has been appointed Ambassador of the Reich in Paris. There can be no doubt that he well deserved his promotion.

## CHAPTER III

# THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE FRENCH SOCIALIST PARTY

### BEFORE 1936

IT is not enough to have shown the extent to which the French Fascists were responsible for the capitulation, we must consider equally whether the Parties making up the Popular Front did nothing to facilitate the tasks of the Fascists. And in the first place we must consider the responsibilities of the Socialist Party, the strongest of the parties victorious in May, 1936, and the one to which fell the main responsibility for Government policy after the elections. We shall try to make this chapter no less honest than the rest of the book. The author will not, cannot forget that he is himself a Socialist, but he will try not to conceal or minimise the mistakes made by his Party.

DOMESTIC POLICY.

Much criticism has been levelled at the Socialist Party. The Party has made mistakes, but many of the reproaches addressed to it are undeserved. How many democrats, for example, think it was wrong in refusing to share power with the Radicals in 1924 and 1932? I think they are mistaken. It may be true that some of the errors of judgment committed by Socialist Ministers in 1936–37 were due to lack of any previous experience of office, but that fact does not lead me to regret having been an opponent of ministerial participation in those years. If we had collaborated with the Radicals in 1924 and 1932, we should presumably have shared the discredit that overtook them. What constituted our main strength in 1936 was that we represented an untried force.

There is, on the other hand, one reproach which in my view can properly be addressed to the French Socialist Party; it is that for a long time it sought to play a part out of proportion to its real strength. Since 1924, in particular, it has been over-concerned with the electoral aspects of politics. Its propaganda lost some of its Socialist qualities. In the effort—a perfectly proper effort—to attract the middle classes to their side, many of its candidates watered down the party programme, in the form in which they presented it to the peasant, the small trader, the minor civil servant. The programme itself remained in conformity with Socialist doctrine. It continued to affirm its revolutionary purpose, to insist on the difference of kind, and not merely of degree that separated it from the "bourgeois" parties. But too many candidates, anxious to win votes from the Radicals, showed themselves, in the heat of the electoral campaign, rather less categoric. The result was that the Socialist Party had from 1924 to 1936 a Parliamentary representation greater than it would have had if it had proclaimed with equal clarity everywhere that it was the party of social transformation and not merely the best defender of small property and the small trader.

My personal conviction is that if it had had a smaller numerical representation, corresponding more accurately to its real strength in the country, it might have escaped some of the internal crises which shook it in the years preceding 1934. If the number of its deputies had increased more slowly in accordance with the growth of its real strength, it would not have begun too soon to play an important part in Parliamentary life. It would have continued to be regarded as an opposition party. The Radicals would have formed what in France are called "concentration" Cabinets, that is to say, they would have allied themselves with those centrist Conservatives who remained Republican. They would have found in opposition to them the Right and the Socialists, but the opposition of the Socialists would have been free of demagogy, bringing pressure to bear on the Cabinet to obtain reforms where possible, not voting systematically against it, sometimes even voting for it, especially on questions of foreign policy. In this way the

progress of democracy towards Socialism would have been more gradual, and the middle bourgeoisie would not have drifted so rapidly towards Fascism. This is my chief complaint in the sphere of domestic policy, and it seems to me to be a more important criticism than that of merely having refused to collaborate successively with Herriot, Daladier or Chautemps.

FOREIGN POLICY.

In the domain of military and foreign policy, many reproaches have been addressed to the Socialist Party by its opponents. Only the two principal ones call for consideration here; up to 1936 it refused to vote military credits, and it was in favour of collaboration with Germany.

Both these reproaches appear to me to be unjust. As regards the military credits, it must be remembered that refusal to vote them was the traditional policy of Socialist parties in all countries, it was the symbol of the party's opposition to the social order. Moreover, the Socialists had shown that they were able to apply their rules with some degree of elasticity, and had upon occasion voted military credits, especially when they had been supporting a Left Government which they wished to keep in office. Moreover, this symbolic proclamation of their opposition in no way indicated a lack of interest in the defence of their country. In contrast with the Communists, they have always proclaimed that they believed in national defence. Faithful to the principles of Jaurès, they showed an interest in Parliament in the organisation of the army. Their speakers were not absent when military topics were under discussion, and if it is remembered that they opposed the construction of the Maginot Line, it may be replied that they did so because they saw prospects of many millions being wasted on concrete at a time when in their view it would have been wiser to show some interest in modern weapons, especially aeroplanes. To-day, few people would be prepared to regard this attitude as wholly unreasonable. Lastly, it should be noted, as indeed it has been in the preceding chapter, that it was the Popular Front Governments that proposed the biggest credits for national defence.

As regards collaboration with Germany, I cannot feel that the Socialists are called upon to apologise for their attitude. It is to their honour that they sought to collaborate fairly and honestly with the Germany of the Weimar Republic, that they opposed the Bloc National policy, with its stupid oscillation between coercion and collaboration, which in fact led to their practising neither. It is to their honour that they opposed the senseless and fruitless occupation of the Ruhr, in opposition to the wishes of Great Britain. It is to their honour that they defended Herriot's Geneva Protocol and Briand's Locarno Pact in 1925, that they demanded general and simultaneous disarmament under proper supervision, at a time when it was still possible to get it. No, none of the accusations brought against the Socialist Party in these matters is deserved. But there are others, really merited, that have rarely been made. The French Socialists have, in my view, been guilty of advocating a vague and sentimental pacifism, of discussing peace in unreal and changing terms, of having given birth to too many bleating pacifists.

Perhaps in order to seek forgiveness for having been a last-ditcher and junior Minister under Clemenceau, Compère-Morel, then a Socialist, began an anti-war campaign round about 1930, based on recent discoveries, especially of poison gases. All this meant, he claimed, that any future war must be a war of extermination, leading to the slaughter of millions of civilians. And the conclusion drawn by many of the more simple-minded of his followers was not only that war was the worst of all evils—a fact that many had suspected for centuries—but that it was in no circumstances justifiable. The sentimental pacifist campaign that followed helped to produce the Munichite Socialists, some of whom preferred servitude to death.

The Socialist leaders, of course, never lent their approval to this demagogic campaign by Compère-Morel. Nevertheless the majority of the party remained unable to see the positive side of the problem of peace. It never believed strongly enough in the possibilities of the organisation of peace through the League of Nations, or understood what an admirable instrument the League could become in the

hands of democracies. Or rather it understood all this too late. It must be admitted that Pierre Renaudel, who was wrong, in my opinion, in the matter of participation in non-Socialist Governments, was nevertheless wholly right in his insistence that the Party should realise how many paths were opened by the Covenant to Socialists, whose Marxian antecedents should have taught them that shedding tears over war can contribute nothing to the construction of peace.

## 2. IN OFFICE

Any discussion of the mistakes and errors of judgment of the Socialist Party has its risks, not because mistakes were never made, but because it too often leads to the temptation to blame the Socialists for all the weaknesses of the Blum Government. It must not be forgotten that the Socialists, though they represented the largest party, found in the Radicals an ally who refused to be treated as a poor relation and exercised a strong influence on Cabinet policy. The man in the street tends to say that the Socialists had a majority in the Cabinet, and had therefore only to use it. This is a superficial view. Discussions in a Cabinet are not like Parliamentary debates, they are settled by compromise, rather than by vote. In a Coalition, all partners are compelled to make concessions. In this sense, indeed, a Ministerial discussion is more like a family council than a Parliamentary body.

With that qualification, the Socialists do deserve criticism, but, as was the case for the period before 1936, it is a criticism different from that usually made by their opponents.

### Legislative Achievements.

We have already described how Léon Blum took office, and how he was obliged to operate in a hurry. When all allowance is made for the circumstances, the results are not to be derided. The Matignon agreements and the legislation that followed gave new hope not only to the working class but also to the lower middle class of town and country,

to peasants, black-coated workers, civil servants, even to tradespeople and industrialists who had suffered from the crisis and were looking forward to a business revival. Irony over purchasing-power theories comes easily to the pen, but the fact remains that the purchasing power of wages in France was ridiculously low. I know of provincial towns where shop-girls were earning 300 francs a month. Clearly, some wage adjustments were inevitable, as were collective contracts and paid holidays. In the same way, it was essential that there should be set up the Wheat Board, the work of the Socialist Minister of Agriculture, Georges Monnet, which is now so popular among the peasants that even the Vichy Government has not dared to destroy it. The nationalisation of war industries was equally popular among the masses, who remembered the brigandage of the "merchants of death," while an equally welcome measure was the reform of the Bank of France, which had weighed heavily on government credit operations whenever government policy had been displeasing to its Council of Regents.

Nor is this all. At the Ministry of Education Jean Zay was working hard to made educational equality a reality. If the Government had survived for another year, he would have completed ingenious plans for changing the method of recruitment of Government services and bringing young men of working-class origin into some of the higher diplomatic and administrative posts hitherto regarded as the close preserve of the upper classes, though the latter had long ago lost the qualities that once made of them a genuine *élite*. Mention must also be made of the magnificent work of the young Socialist Under-Secretary for Leisure, Léo Lagrange, on behalf of youth and sport.

At the risk of shocking much ready-made opinion, I am prepared to affirm that the first few weeks of Popular Front government were among the most fruitful in the history of the Third Republic. The majority of the country had a Government of its own choice. Ordinary men and women, for whom politics had no appeal, refused to listen to attacks on Ministers who in a few short weeks had transformed the conditions in which they lived and worked. Intellectual and artistic circles felt something like a breath of new life.

All France began to hope again ; and national defence itself inevitably gained from it all, for a country is always better defended if its citizens are happy and free.

The early reforms, then, were excellent. No less excellent was the way in which they were voted. The legislative machine worked at high speed and in a manner that did much to restore for a time the prestige of the Parliamentary régime.

THE WORK OF THE GOVERNMENT.

To pass new laws, however, even good laws, is not enough. A Government must govern. And it is when we turn to that subject that praise must become less enthusiastic. In order to carry through its work to a proper conclusion, the Blum Government should have tackled what was called the purge. Let us, however, be clear as to what was meant by the term. Nobody wanted them to require of their officials, after the fashion of dictatorships, that they should share the views of the Government in power. But every Government has the right to demand that its higher officials, and especially the Prefects (in France, the representatives of the central authority in the provinces) should carry out their instructions, that the holders of important administrative posts should not try to sabotage its work, that its diplomats should not seek to discredit it abroad, instead of serving it.

Now it must be admitted that the Blum Government never carried its purges far enough and showed too little of the spirit of authority towards the high officials who were working against its policy. By which I mean that the Radicals did nothing to help in the clean-up of Government offices ; far from it. But that is no more than an attenuating circumstance. Socialist Ministers sometimes revealed a degree of *naïveté* that was more than disconcerting. A short time before its fall, for instance, the Cabinet set up a Committee of financial experts which included among its members Jacques Rueff, one of the economists most bitterly opposed to Socialism, and the reactionary and future capitulationist, Paul Baudouin. Incredible, but true.[1]

[1] But see footnote at end of chapter.

THE 40-HOUR WEEK.

The forty-hour week has been the subject of so much and so persistent criticism, that it seems desirable to give it separate consideration. In the first place, it is a mistake to accept the view that the forty-hour week was an obstacle to armament and other forms of production necessary for national defence. The law itself made provision for all the modifications necessary in this respect. But when that has been said, it must also be admitted that the forty-hour week, coming after an increase in wages, could only be absorbed by the economic system of the country if it were followed by an immediate devaluation of the franc. The Minister of Finance, Vincent Auriol, might justifiably have replied that the Communists were hostile to any devaluation. It is true, but that did not prevent them from voting for it in September. They could have been compelled to vote for it in June.

It must be admitted too that the law was probably insufficiently elastic. The provision for two consecutive rest days was doubtless unwise; it would have been better to provide for a rota for the second rest day. Léon Blum, who held this view from the beginning, was wrong in giving way to trade union pressure regarding this particular detail of the application of the law.

Yet it is either stupid or dishonest to blame the forty-hour week for the disorganisation of production. Is it so easy to wipe out the memory of the years before the Popular Front came into power? Unemployment was increasing month by month, and to set the industrial machine in motion again, a reduction of the working day seemed the most reasonable method, not only to the workers, but to many manufacturers as well. I could quote names, some of them very well known, in support of this statement. Moreover, the Popular Front reforms did reduce unemployment. There remained little more than the "hard core," that is to say the older unemployed, no longer suited for work.

More justified is the reproach sometimes addressed to the Blum Government, to the effect that it had not carried out what were rather improperly called structural reforms—

nationalisation of key industries, electricity, chemicals, mines, etc., and of credit. The experience of the last few years, in fact, showed that these were essential reforms, if we were not again to see the great trusts securing a hold on the apparatus of Government and impeding the policies demanded by the electors, while the leaders of certain industrial groups and credit establishments were subsidising Fascist organisations. This was the conviction of the Socialists, and they had tried to secure the inclusion of these reforms in the programme of the Popular Front. They had failed, because they found both Radicals and Communists opposed to them. We shall return to this point.

### Spain.

The great weakness of the Popular Front Governments was, as is well known, their foreign policy. It has become necessary to examine at this stage the responsibility of the Socialists, and of Léon Blum in particular, for the non-intervention policy which was the beginning of what may euphemistically be called the errors of judgment.

Léon Blum has been made to bear responsibilities in the Spanish business that are not properly his. It is time the truth was told. I can do so with a clear conscience, since I was, with Jean Zyromski, one of those who protested from the beginning against the non-intervention policy. The motion carried at the Socialist Party Congress at Marseilles in 1937, a motion demanding full liberty of commerce for Republican Spain, bore my signature.

The decision in favour of non-intervention was taken in August, 1936. In July nothing was further from Blum's mind. I was in London with him at that time, when he spent two days here, together with Yvon Delbos, making contact with Messrs Baldwin and Eden. There is no reason to hide the fact that the British Conservative Government was alarmed at the prospect of France's entering upon a policy of help to Republican Spain. I can still hear Léon Blum replying to a French journalist who told him of the fears of the British Conservatives. "Never mind all that," he said impatiently; "the Spanish Government is a

legitimate Government and, what is more, a friendly Government."

When Blum returned to Paris, Camille Chautemps was waiting for him on the Le Bourget aerodrome and immediately began to talk of the dangers of the Spanish War. Yvon Delbos shared the views of Chautemps. Even Edouard Herriot, even the President of the Senate, Jeanneney, at that time preached the policy called non-intervention, but which the blindness of the democracies allowed gradually to be transformed into intervention in favour of Fascism. And it is hardly necessary to add that the reactionaries tried to divide the country, and succeeded. They drew pictures of the Popular Front throwing the French peasants into war to help the Reds. Henri de Kérillis was one of the most active anti-Republicans. For him even non-intervention was not enough; he wanted intervention on the side of Franco. Only the memory of his courageous attitude since 1938 makes it possible to forgive this attack of madness.

The most stupid of the Francoists pretended that Franco was not bound to Hitler. Others were more cynical. At a later period of the war, when someone pointed out privately to Flandin that a victory for the Caudillo would bring the axis powers on to the Pyrenean frontier, he replied simply, "Why not?"

Blum tried to hold out against this attitude. At the first Cabinet meeting at which the matter was discussed, his opinion prevailed, but he was compelled to yield at the next meeting. Supplications and objurgations assailed him from all sides. The majority of the Radicals were against him, especially the Deputy-Premier, Chautemps and Delbos, the Foreign Minister. The President of the Republic, Albert Lebrun, joined them. Lebrun, indeed, was frightened to death, afraid of being afraid. By open aid to the Spanish Republic, Blum risked destroying his own Cabinet. I am not sure that he was not even threatened with the resignation of the President. Perseverance on this road was useless. *But he could have resigned.* He thought of it. For some hours, with the full agreement of his friend and Finance Minister, Vincent Auriol, he was determined

to do it. It was a representative of the Spanish Government who dissuaded him, on the ground that the withdrawal of the Government under a Socialist Prime Minister would be the worst solution from the Spanish Republican point of view. Blum allowed himself to be persuaded.

Such is the truth about the beginnings of non-intervention. I have always held the opinion that Blum was wrong in yielding. *He should have resigned and left to the advocates of non-intervention the responsibility for putting their own principles into practice.* I am sure that popular pressure would have brought him back into power a few months later. The French people would have understood that he was resigning because he could not secure the acceptance of a policy in conformity with the interests of French democracy and of French security.

The point to be remembered in all this is that Blum had a choice only between resignation and non-intervention. In August, 1936, his choice was not between open help for Spain and non-intervention.

## Léon Blum.

It is time to say something of Blum himself—a difficult task for a colleague, who may easily allow friendship and admiration to run away with him. A difficult task, too, because it involves the destruction of a whole series of lying legends.

He has been presented as an æsthete, a pure intellectual, remote from the real world. For a long time the caricaturists drew him always as tall, thin and hollow-cheeked. In fact he is very solidly built, with broad shoulders. The "pure intellectual" knows something of sport, and has practised cycling, fencing, boxing. He is a man, a man of bone and muscle, in no way unappreciative of food and the healthy material pleasures of life, a man, indeed, with all the delicacy of palate of a genuine gourmet. And with all due respect to his opponents, who liked to pretend that he was a teetotaller, in order to discredit him among his constituents in the wine-growing district of Narbonne, he has a connoisseur's appreciation of the best French vintages.

Because he is short-sighted and tall, and therefore capable in moments of meditation of passing one of his friends without seeing him, his opponents have described him as aloof. Fortunately the members of the French Socialist Party know better. He knows the Socialist workers well and takes an interest in their welfare and their families. He understands the meaning of friendship and is as capable of gaiety, of playfulness even, as a much younger man. There is in him nothing of the egoist, no lack of human sympathy. It is, indeed, no rare thing to find opponents who have been warned against him admitting that they had been enchanted by the charm of his speech and the open directness of his welcome.

There is no need to pay homage to his sincerity and honesty. Even his enemies would not risk casting doubt upon them. As for his mind, it would be difficult to find one better ordered. "His own clear mind clarifies that of others," said Marcel Sembat. He throws on to all problems a veritable shaft of light that reveals both their extent and their depth. And this mind of unequalled quality, this keen analytical brain is nourished on the highest and most varied culture and has an expert's appreciation of art. And not, as one might be tempted to believe, in any bookish sense. He is an artist who admires not only the beauty to be found in books or even in museums, but who loves and understands Nature, and knows and appreciates all the varying landscapes of France. There is nothing he loves more than harmonious architecture in the setting of a well-planned garden. None appreciates better than he our authors and our men of letters, our artists and the poetry that springs from the most harmonious country in the world. It is when one thinks of Léon Blum that one realises to the full the stupidity of the capitulationist Baudouin, who accused the French Jews of "not having accepted the spiritual and intellectual heritage of France."

The physical and moral courage of Léon Blum cannot be and has not been contested. He has even a sort of intellectual recklessness which leads him to defend an idea to the limit of its consequences; so that when he had once accepted the idea of non-intervention in the circumstances

described above, he defended it as if it had always been his own.

Lucidity, courage, sense of responsibility, he has in the highest degree these essential qualities of the statesman. So much so that one is sometimes surprised by the errors of judgment of his Government, such as those described above, and by the unsatisfactory reasons offered for them. Some people claim that he is weak, easily influenced, incapable of energy of decision. All these suggestions are ridiculous for anyone who knows Léon Blum. There is nothing weak about him. He knows how to make up his mind and hold on to his decisions with a vigour that nothing can shake. As for his being easily influenced, there is in fact no man less so. To attempt to lead him along a chosen path is a waste of time. He listens to advice, seeks it even, but the decisions are his alone.

For my own part, I am inclined to explain the unwisdom of some of his decisions by the simple fact that he entered politics too late in life. He was for too long a student and a theorist rather than a man of action. Though he has been a Socialist since his early youth, he entered active politics when he was approaching the fifties. For twenty-five years he was the most subtle jurist of the *Conseil d'Etat* and most clear-sighted dramatic critic of his time. That is the kind of education that can easily lead one, not so much to neglect the concrete as to reconstruct it in one's own mind. I was astonished to hear him say in a speech that it was only when he took over the direction of affairs that he realised the extent to which our weakness after the reoccupation of the Rhineland had destroyed our European friendships. Yet long before he became Prime Minister he had been following foreign politics day by day. But he followed it, no doubt, too much as a detached student, without entering sufficiently into international life, without having made a sufficient effort to compare the living realities of the Europe of 1935–36 with his own intellectual concepts.

In addition, not having had to take political decisions early in life, he is perhaps too anxious to understand the opinions of others. In the Socialist Party, moreover, he was for long an arbiter and conciliator rather than a leader.

I think he was the same in the Government. I repeat that it is not that he was easily influenced, but that he influenced himself too easily. He listens to all sides of an argument, grasps their meaning and compels himself to take full account of them. Such a method may lead to the wisest of decisions, but it can lead also to over-hesitation.

Indeed, the more I reflect on this matter, the more I am convinced that it is his professional training and his late entry into politics that alone explain any errors of judgment of which he may have been guilty, both inside and outside the Government. All the same, I remember his having said to me, in speaking of a statesman who had just died, " He belonged to the élite of the human race." I knew Léon Blum and I affirm that he, too, belongs to that élite. He is one of those whose participation in it honours political life. Where men like Laval degrade everything, those like Blum put everything they touch on a higher plane. There is in him nothing common or mean. Nobility of mind is his dominant quality, the one that explains all the others and makes it easy to excuse the imperfections of his work.

## 3. MUNICH AND AFTER

We come now to the capital blunder of the Socialists, the attitude of the Munichites and the weakness of the others who continued to associate with them in the same party.

The pacifist Socialist and Trade Unionists bear an overwhelming responsibility for the events which preceded the war and brought it about. Here I speak only of the Socialists, since the organisation of the labour movement in France is quite different from its English counterpart, in that there is no organic bond between the Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labour. But I shall be compelled at times to allude in passing to the attitude of some of the Munichite Trade Unionists, which was closely bound up with that of the Socialist supporters of Munich.

Some of them, moreover, like René Belin, Assistant-Secretary of the C.G.T., André Delmas of the teachers' union and the leading members of the postal workers' federation, were members of the party.

At the time of Munich, all the hidden pacifism that had lain in the hearts of some of the working-class leaders came to the surface. It is, I presume, unnecessary to explain that when I speak of pacifists I mean advocates of peace at any price. The true pacifists, I am quite sure, were the supporters of resistance to Fascism. Yet these latter were called warmongers and bellicists by the "pacifists" of the Socialist and Trade Union movements, who never stopped to ask if they were not thus playing the Fascist game. The idea, indeed, was outside their categories of thought. Words like Fascism and anti-Fascism no longer had any meaning for them; there were only pacifists and warmongers, peace and war, supporters and opponents of Munich. They never wondered about the pacifism of the men of the Right, whom they were so ready to accept as allies. They forgot even the remarks of Flandin when he explained his first moves towards pacifism by saying that the most important thing was not to leave the Left with a monopoly of the pacifist platform, which was bringing them so much electoral success.

### The Different Kinds of Munichite.

There were several kinds of Socialist Munichite, but with a little simplification they can be reduced to two main currents. On the one hand were those who were opposed on principle to all wars and even to national defence in any form. They included ex-anarchists, former disciples of Gustave Hervé, with his theories of "anti-patriotism," ex-soldiers disgusted by the last war, ex-Communists, or supporters of Marceau Pivert, who, with a general attitude close to that of the Trotskyists, repeated ready-made formulæ like "no national defence under capitalism," posed as doctrinaires and hid behind a deformed Marx, whom they called in to explain that all international conflicts were capitalist conflicts.

On the other hand were the friends of Paul Faure, who advocated a kind of nationalist pacifism. They refused to face the facts about Hitlerism, confused 1938 with 1914, imagined that to seek agreement with the dictators was enough to get it, and added that since Germany had been victimised by the Treaty of Versailles, she was entitled to serious concessions. They were prepared to defend their own country, but nothing else. Without in the least suspecting it, they were narrow nationalists, petty bourgeois with none of the breadth of vision required of an internationalist Socialist. They saw no reason to move a finger in defence of oppressed peoples. They had no belief in collective security and distrusted bilateral agreements. Above all, anti-Bolshevik to such an extent that they detested Stalin more than Hitler, they were opposed to the Franco-Soviet pact, which in their view carried in itself all the germs of war.

Fundamentally, the ideas of the Faurist pacifists were very close to those of the friends of Georges Bonnet. It is therefore not surprising that these two groups should have been more or less closely linked. One remembers that the German Communists were at one point not unwilling to go part of the way with the Pangermanists of the Reventlow school. A Socialist Deputy named René Brunet took part, moreover, in the secret meetings in the rooms of Georges Bonnet. Like Mistler, de Monzie, Bergery and their fellows he was one of the authors of the capitulation of Munich. For Brunet is an international lawyer, who did not consider it incompatible with his functions as a Socialist Deputy to act in his professional capacity on behalf of the Hungarian nationalists, and of the Sudeten industrialist Kundt, or to be on excellent terms with the German embassy. What is surprising is that Paul Faure, at one time so suspicious and so scrupulous in matters of this kind, should have made of Brunet one of his intimates; perhaps he felt that pacifism could cover a multitude of sins. Brunet was not alone in his intrigues with Bonnet, who made use also of certain members of the teachers' and postal workers' unions. He even encouraged them to agitate within their organisations against the military

measures decided upon by the Cabinet. But it is perhaps better not to insist too much on the details of this side of the affair, which is far from being the least painful aspect of the whole Munich story.

What must be remembered is that the Socialist Munichites finally began to talk the same language as the bourgeois Munichites. They explained the Sudeten business in the same way as the most reactionary papers, spoke of "Czechia" and complained of the foreign and diplomatic correspondents of the Party organ, the *Populaire*, whom they accused of stirring up hatred, because the *Populaire* staff wrote in appropriate terms of Hitler and his gangsters. And to round it all off, the friends of Paul Faure were not above a little anti-semitism upon occasion.

As secretary of the Party, Paul Faure had a considerable influence over the secretaries of the Departmental Federations and over the young people of the Socialist Youth movement. This influence, which he owed both to his great services to the Party in the past and to his open and friendly manner, he used and abused. Through the activities of himself and his friends, the Socialist Youth Movement became a nursery of defeatism. The young people of the party, whose anti-Fascist enthusiasm a few years earlier had made it necessary to restrain them from imprudent acts (and none knows this better than I, since I was their secretary from 1926 to 1934), these young people had developed a sort of conscientious objection to war, which had none of the spiritual nobility that one finds in genuine C.O.'s. At the Party's annual demonstration at the Mur des Fédérés (where the working-class fighters had been executed in 1871), they marched past with shouts of "Down with war, we want to live!" A strange cry indeed from a fighting party with a revolutionary tradition!

### The Congresses of Montrouge and Nantes.

Life in the Party was becoming impossible. Discord was growing every day. The Permanent Administrative Commission (our Executive), had an anti-Munich majority, while the majority of the Parliamentary group supported

Paul Faure. It became necessary to call a special Congress, which was duly held towards the end of December in the Paris suburb of Montrouge. For this Congress, Léon Blum drew up a motion in which he defended the classic position of Socialism, and proclaimed again the duty of resistance to oppression. This found the support of the resisters of all kinds, from moderate Socialists who had formerly been followers of Renaudel, like Marius Moutet and Marx Dormoy, from Jean Lebas, a disciple of Jules Guesde, to the leader of the Left Wing, Jean Zyromski. Paul Faure rallied all the pacifists, from the followers of Marceau Pivert to moderates like Spinasse. Despite all the efforts of Paul Faure, who controlled the Party machine, Blum won the day.

At this point those who favoured resistance to Fascism should have drawn the conclusion which in fact the Congress decision imposed ; they should have asked for the resignation of Paul Faure. But they were weak, and left him at his post. The Party became ungovernable, and the battle began all over again at Whitsuntide, at the annual Congress at Nantes. Blum still had a majority, but some of his supporters felt that they should not risk destroying the unity of the Party by defeating Faure. So they came to an arrangement with him, and what in consequence emerged from the Nantes Congress was a " reconciliation " motion, one of the unanimous motions beloved of the French Socialist Party, which have come to be known as black and white resolutions, *des motions nègres-blancs*.

André Blumel, formerly principal private secretary (*directeur de cabinet*) to Blum when the latter was Prime Minister, and myself resigned from the Executive. We had not the temerity to believe that our departure could have any political repercussions, but we could not accept our share of the responsibility for the state of impotence that was bound to result, and that indeed did result, for on the eve of and during the war the Executive remained hopelessly divided, incapable of reaching any decision and condemned to the equivocations imposed on it by the Nantes resolution. So that French Socialism went through the war without having the slightest grip on events.

If, on the other hand, we had not sacrificed everything at Nantes to an appearance of unity, Blum would again have carried the Congress. Paul Faure would doubtless have resigned, but he would have been followed by no more than a relatively small minority. Without the leading Faurists, the Party would have been a by no means negligible force. It would have played a part in many ways similar to that of the Labour Party in England and the Cabinet would have been compelled to seek its collaboration at an early stage. Léon Blum and perhaps Marx Dormoy, one of the most courageous of the Socialsts, would have entered the Government. The whole course of events might well have been different; capitulation might have been avoided . . .

We have seen, then, that the Socialist Party had made mistakes. But they are all of minor importance in comparison with the refusal to drive the Munichites from its leading offices. That was its capital blunder, against the country, against democracy, against international Socialism.

*Footnote to page* 111: Much more could be said about the weakness of the financial policy of the Popular Front. Its financial and economic liberalism, its price policy, its failure to introduce exchange control at the time of the concentrated capitalist attack on the franc, and in general its failure to use measures of coercion against the banks, so powerful in France, and so influential among the large class of small bondholders—all these are open to criticism. The whole question, indeed, deserves a book to itself.

CHAPTER IV

# THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

## 1. FROM 1919 TO 1936

LET us pass from consideration of the Socialists to that of the Communists, since they too had their part in the formation and working of the Popular Front.

I shall speak without passion of the Communists, though it will require something of an effort to do so. A Socialist cannot forget that it is the Communist parties that bear the responsibility for the schisms that have ravaged the working-class movement in all countries since 1919. By trying to provoke a world revolution, the Communists have succeeded only in bringing Fascism. This fact cannot be forgotten in a history of the capitulation in which Fascism played so large a part. But it is not my intention to go too far back into the past.

Nor do I propose to confuse the French Communist Party with the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. Whatever may have been one's opinions on the ideas and methods of Bolshevism, it was impossible not to realise how greatly to the interest of France was the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet pact. Was it not, moreover, true, from a purely Socialist point of view, that the best method of leading the Soviets to a democratisation of the regime was to tighten as much as possible the bonds that linked them with the western democracies?

I shall say nothing, therefore, of the U.S.S.R., nor even of the Russo-German Pact of August, 1939. Or rather, I shall mention this only in so far as I discuss its repercussions on the attitude of the French Communists. For

the moment, and without seeking to disentangle the errors and blunders that brought about this profoundly regrettable event, I will limit myself to comment on one of its outward aspects. It must, I think, be said, that from the point of view of the worker what was more shocking than the signature of the pact itself was the way in which it was signed, the honours with which Ribbentrop was surrounded, the Order of Lenin on the breast of one of the murderers of the German workers. Those were the things that wounded more than anything else the conscience of the working class throughout the world. And if I recall this detail now, it is by no means in order to stimulate hatreds that I wish rather to see appeased, but because in this we touch on one of the fundamental characteristics of bolshevism, on which no explanation of the Communist attitude can be satisfactory. In reality, Bolshevism cares nothing for the opinion of the masses. The end, in its view, justifies the means. It is a system which assumes that the masses must be guided by an élite, acting in accordance with its own views and inclinations. Hence the so-called "democratic centralisation," which in practice is a caricature of democracy.

## Before 1934.

So we return to the French Communist Party. In a general way—but not always unanimously, for there was from time to time a kicking over of traces that led to exclusions from the party—the French Communist Party has for twenty years accepted the most contradictory tactics imposed upon it by its "élite," that is to say, by the Comintern, the leaders of the Third International. In the municipal elections of 1925, the Communists withdrew their candidates at the second ballot in favour of other Left candidates who had beaten them in the first ballot, but without securing the absolute majority necessary for election at that stage; in 1928 and 1932 they practised what was called "the tactic of class against class," which split the Left vote and sent reactionaries to the Chamber in place of Socialists or Radicals. They

obeyed all orders in a spirit of complete subjection. They attacked national defence and claimed to be interested only in the "Socialist fatherland." Hatred of "social democrats" became for them an article of faith, they referred to them invariably as "social-traitors," and treated them deliberately as the lackeys of the bourgeoisie, while they tried "infiltration" tactics, by means of the camouflaged Communist organisations with which they riddled every working-class body. And that lasted exactly from 1920 to 1934; fourteen years of working-class division, which were not without influence on the growth of French Fascism.

## After February 6th.

In 1934 everything changed. It was not before time, and even then it did not happen at once. On February 6th, Communists were demonstrating along with the Fascists against the "rottenness of Parliament." It is true that by February 9th they were reacting, and that under the leadership of Doriot, who was then still in their ranks, they organised a sort of anti-Fascist riot. On February 12th they took part in the demonstration organised by the C.G.T. Then they began to preach unity of action with the Socialists, though in a rather peculiar manner, since they used ultra-demagogic slogans like *Daladier au poteau*, "Death to Daladier."

But gradually, as Franco-Soviet relations improved, their policy changed, and they accepted sincere and genuine unity of action—sincere and genuine, at any rate, on the surface—with the Socialists. And in 1925 they were among the founders of the Committee of the "Rassemblement Populaire," which, as we have seen, preceded the Popular Front. In a year, our Bolsheviks had been transformed. They had become resolutely anti-Fascist, Republican, democratic and above all *jacobin*, patriotic, that is to say, with the revolutionary patriotism of 1793. In their new-found patriotism they went very far, calling for the union of all Frenchmen,

" stretching out their hands," in their own phrase, to the Catholics. Their preoccupation was the creation of the widest possible unity against Hitler.

The reader may smile, and he may be assured that many of us did so at the time. But after all, was it not better that the Communists should return to the democratic and revolutionary traditions of France, even if they rather clumsily overdid it at points? We felt this all the more, moreover, as we knew that this attitude, to which they were to owe their electoral successes in 1936, was in accord with the secret sympathies of many of their active workers. I myself knew of many who had practised only with great regret the " class against class " tactic, which had led to their being crushingly defeated at the polls. They were glad to seize the opportunity to parade their Republican and patriotic sentiment, which had remained buried for so long and corresponded so accurately with the true feelings of the working masses of France. I do not know whether Maurice Thorez and Jacques Duclos were ever wholly sincere, and I tend indeed to feel that they were not, but I believe that Marcel Cachin, whose Socialism had once had a strong tinge of patriotism, or Racamond, a Trade Union leader whose whole history was linked with that of the Parisian proletariat, were delighted when at last orthodoxy coincided with the open expression of their real opinions. I cannot help comparing them with Litvinov, another old Socialist, who was undoubtedly delighted to be able to pursue a reasonable policy at Geneva and who found in the diplomatic game in those circumstances a pleasure that was evident to all.

Be that as it may, it remains true that the Communist leaders gave a remarkable rendering of their new rôle. They played an active part in the meetings of the Popular Front and spoke the jargon of democracy as if it had always been their own. The only element that seemed to survive from their past theories was their hatred of the Socialists. Not that it was expressed. It was hidden behind a mask of " fraternal feeling," or by fine words about " our Socialist comrades." But, except in the case of a few people like Racamond, it was difficult to feel that it was anything more

than a veneer. At any rate, they never lost an opportunity of carrying on the family feud by playing unfriendly tricks against their nearest competitors.

### MAKING UP TO THE RADICALS.

For the Communists, the most important thing was to gain the sympathy and support of the Radicals. And I have met Radicals who were so completely taken in by this policy that they said that the realism of the Communists made it easier to reach an understanding with them than with the too doctrinaire Socialists. So that when the first Popular Front manifestation took place on July 14th, 1935, the well-drilled Communist workers shouted, " Daladier for Premier ! "

During the winter, when the Popular Front programme was being drawn up, the Socialists, as has already been said, proposed a number of structural reforms, including especially the nationalisation of key industries. The Communists showed no enthusiasm for these reforms, though they so clearly touched French large-scale capitalism in its most vital spot. They took refuge in doctrinal rigidity, argued endlessly, pretended that nationalisation in the form proposed was not socialisation and not a Socialist measure. What in fact they wanted was to avoid hurting the feelings of the Radicals, who were opposed to nationalisation, and so they helped them to keep these important reforms out of the Popular Front programme. In reality, the content of the programme did not interest them. They wanted the constitution of the widest possible Popular Front, and the future, they felt, could be left to itself. If there are things they lack, a sense of opportunism is not one.

## 2. FROM 1936 TO 1940

There is no doubt that the Communists were disappointed to find the Socialists heading the poll. What they had hoped for was a Ministry under a Radical, not a Socialist Premier. At the very beginning, when the Cabinet was

being formed, they made their first mistake; they refused the Cabinet posts offered them by Blum. Men like Marcel Cachin and Gabriel Péri had realised that the very nature of the coalition laid an obligation on them to accept their share of Ministerial responsibiltiy. But what could their view do against orders "from above"? Honesty, moreover, compels one to add that the Radicals were not anxious to share office with them, and that some Socialists—of whom Blum was not one—showed no greater anxiety for it.

Let it, moreover, be admitted that at the beginning they loyally supported the Government and did not seek to create difficulties for it. I have stated above that the first stay-in strikes were spontaneous movements, not stimulated by the Communists. But that is not to say that there were not here and there factories in which the Communist cells added fuel to the flames, in order to get control of the movement for themselves, as was their custom. But the Communist leaders did nothing to impede the efforts of the Government, and Maurice Thorez pointed out to the workers that one of the important things in a strike was to know when to stop.

### Their Anti-Socialism.

But this good behaviour did not last long. Demagogy soon got the upper hand again. Not only did they begin a rather bitter campaign in favour of old age pensions in the middle of the winter "pause" that Blum regarded as necessary, but they made no effort to check certain tendencies that were beginning to show themselves in the factories. I am not suggesting that the Communists fomented all the strikes that broke out in 1937. In many cases events were simply beyond their control, and most of the strikes were the result of serious provocation on the part of the employers, assisted by obscure Trotskyist manœuvres. It is possible that the Communists themselves lost control of their followers. But they never resisted their innate temptation to seek to lead the movement, once it had begun. It must be frankly admitted that at this

period the working class does not appear to have reached the degree of maturity that one might reasonably have hoped for. It allowed itself too easily to be carried away by demagogic and destructive agitators. The workers ought to have understood that the strikes that held up the Paris Exhibition of 1937 produced the worst possible effect and reacted seriously against their own Government, the Government of Léon Blum. The so-called "*amicales*," the Socialist organisations within each factory, which under the influence of the friends of Paul Faure played such an unfortunate part at the time of Munich, did very useful work during the strikes. The same cannot be said of the Communist cells, which were very powerful in the industries of the Paris region. In reality, the Communists did not want the Blum Cabinet to last too long, and this in particular because its foreign policy was not to their liking. I am still convinced that if the Blum Government had pursued a vigorously anti-Fascist foreign policy, the Communists would have been obliged to support it, despite their instinctive dislike of Social-democracy. For in 1936 the masses would never have forgiven them for overturning a Government that was giving them satisfaction in all fields.

What finally proves the dominance among the Communists of hatred—and perhaps even more of distrust—of the Socialists, is the fact that a year later, in March, 1938, when they were certain that the people no longer felt the same attachment to the Popular Front, they did nothing to help the second Blum Cabinet, against whose foreign policy they could have had no complaint.

### Paul-Boncour and the Second Blum Cabinet.

The history of the second Blum Government is not sufficiently well known, and it is worth while giving a brief account of it here. A Chautemps Cabinet had collapsed at the time of the Anschluss, and Léon Blum was asked to form a Government. He was assailed by difficulties of all kinds, internal and external. He decided to take a bold line, and prepared a series of ingenious and effective measures

of financial reform, calculated to hit capitalism hard. At the same time, and with the full co-operation of his Foreign Minister, he embarked resolutely on an anti-Fascist foreign policy.

This Foreign Minister was Paul-Boncour, one of the best Ministers ever to go to the Quai d'Orsay. It is true that, with his heavy thatch of white hair and his finely-cut features, he seems deliberately to be cultivating the appearance of a member of the revolutionary assembly of 1793, and there is no doubt that the resemblance gives him pleasure. But this is a minor foible. Despite a certain affectation in his oratory and an element of the dandy in his bearing, Paul-Boncour has great qualities. His melodious and rather husky voice lends itself to something more than romantic speeches, interlaced with neatly-coined phrases ; it works wonders in diplomatic negotiations or in the council chambers of Geneva. Paul-Boncour is a born negotiator, attractive, courteous, tenacious, like a lawyer who always makes the most of his brief. It is to him that we owe the Montreux Convention of 1936, thanks to which, three years later, we found Turkey on our side. In addition, he is a convinced anti-Fascist. There is, no doubt, nothing in him of the "doctrinaire" Socialist, and the discipline of the S.F.I.O.[1] irked him so much that he left the Party round about 1930, but he has never vacillated in his Republican and jacobin convictions.

In three weeks he transformed a rapidly deteriorating international situation. He made it clear that Czechoslovakia was not to be abandoned, endeavoured to strengthen the slackening bonds of the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente, and revivified our declining international friendships and alliances. At the same time he showed that he did not propose to allow the farce of non-intervention to continue, and proclaimed in no uncertain terms his sympathy for the Spanish Republic.

Yet despite all this, the Communists did nothing to keep alive the Cabinet to which he belonged. They never lifted

[1] *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*, French Section of the Workers' International, the official title of the French Socialist Party.

a finger to put an end to strikes cunningly provoked and protracted by mysterious agencies. For a second time, Léon Blum was defeated by the Senate, which in France still has power of life and death over Governments, and the strikes enormously facilitated the Senate's work of destruction. A few days later Daladier became Prime Minister, and the strikes ceased as if by magic.

The story of Communist mistakes does not end there, but the minor ones must be omitted. Space allows no more than a reminder of the events of November 30th, 1938. At this time the real desire of the Communists was to arouse the working class against Munich. But they had not the courage to say so in the discussions that took place within the C.G.T., and limited themselves to supporting and encouraging those who wanted a general strike for professional reasons. It is they who bear the heaviest responsibility for the calling of the one-day general strike that was destined in advance to failure. The strike undoubtedly did fail, and the repression that followed was used by Daladier as an opportunity to embark on a frankly reactionary policy. The mainspring of the working-class movement was broken, and so one of the essential elements of national unity was lacking at a time when unity was more than ever necessary.

### The Communists During the War.

It is almost impossible to describe without risk of error the attitude of the Communists during the war. Too many facts are still unknown to make possible anything more than an approximation to the truth.

What is certain is that, with very few exceptions, the Communist leaders showed themselves to be faithful servants of Moscow. The news of the Russo-German pact left them unmoved, at least in their public attitudes. It is a strange and sad fact that the number of prominent Communists who refused to accept it is infinitesimal. I am speaking here only of the members of the Executive of the party, the professionals, so to speak. Upwards of a dozen Deputies proclaimed their disagreement, as did some well-known

intellectuals, like Professor Langevin and Romain Rolland. A more tactful policy on the part of Daladier would, moreover, have produced some striking disavowals. I remember meeting a very well-known Communist journalist during September. In a few days he had aged by ten years. "This is appalling," he murmured, but when I pressed him to disavow his party, he explained that his comrades were to be prosecuted and that he did not want to be accused of cowardice.

The attitude of the leaders, at any rate, was most depressing. These proud anti-Fascist fighters, these pitiless critics of the over-tenderness of Socialist policy towards Hitler, defended Stalin's Munich with embarrassed but obstinate argument. Even after the invasion of Poland by the Soviets, they continued to explain and excuse. Such an attitude could provoke only disgust, and above all confusion among their genuinely anti-Fascist followers, and the confusion in its turn inevitably became an obstacle to national unity. And to make matters worse, Government policy itself added to the confusion in a way that will be discussed later.

Can it be claimed, despite all this, that the Communists have any *direct* responsibility for the collapse and the capitulation? In all honesty it cannot be said that they have. There may have been in isolated centres of the army some pacifist propaganda of Communist inspiration. Even here one must tread carefully; it is true that certain high officers thought they had found traces of Communist propaganda, but it is possible that they classed as Communist an agitation that was really the work of some of the Munichite pacifists of the workers' movement. One cannot embark on hypotheses of this kind without practising a high degree of caution, but what does appear to me to be certain is that there was not in the French army any large-scale organisation of Communist cells. I have already said in an earlier part of this book that to the officers I met at Rethel the idea of a Communist plot in any way connected with the collapse on the Meuse seemed nonsense. It is important, moreover, to remember what must have been the state of mind of the French Communists at the time

of the mobilisation; they cannot at that date have received from Moscow any defeatist or pacifist instructions. They voted for the war credits, and tried to explain the Russo-German pact as an effort by Stalin to "fool" Hitler.

But, it will be objected, there was all the Communist propaganda in the factories. Here again the facts must be assessed with caution. I have not yet met any very certain or very decisive example of this propaganda. One very important point must not be overlooked; measures had been taken in advance against those who were regarded as Communist agitators, there had been preventive arrests, there had been, above all, the drafting into the army, under more or less discreet supervision, of very many Communist Party workers and sympathisers. On the other hand, it is certain that in many factories the Communists must have maintained some of the links between their members. They must have received instructions and tried to distribute the secretly printed numbers of *l'Humanité*, or the leaflets whose attacks on England were as disgusting as the wireless speeches of Ferdonnet. It is equally evident that the handfuls of Communists scattered throughout the factories of the Paris region cannot have displayed much zeal for intensive production. Nevertheless, examples of attempted sabotage can be found with certainty only during one period, that of the Finnish war.

All this can be taken for granted, yet I must point out that it was a big industrialist of the Paris region who assured me that some of the Communists sent as a precautionary measure from his factory into the army had behaved irreproachably. And from the same source I learned that during the month of May and the first fortnight of June *all his workers without distinction of party* showed themselves ready for any sacrifice. All understood that circumstances demanded of them the maximum possible effort, and in the employers' meetings in the automobile industry, no complaint was ever heard at this period against the spirit of the workers.

I believe that in the preceding pages I have shown no indulgence towards the Communists. I have overlooked none of their grievous mistakes in the past. I am equally sincere when I say that I cannot believe that the French

Communists tried to put into effect any general defeatist scheme, minutely planned and methodically operated. There were only unco-ordinated acts which had no serious influence on the development of the war. I have attributed to the French Communist Party responsibilities that are already sufficiently serious ; I have no desire to add to them, on the strength of unverified rumours, the additional responsibility of having contributed directly to the defeat of their country. But note that I say " directly."

# CHAPTER V

# THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE RADICAL PARTY

## 1. HERRIOT AND THE RADICAL MENTALITY

### What the Radical Party is.

Foreign countries do not often understand the nature of the French Radical Party. Its full name is the Republican-Radical and Socialist-Radical Party. It is not to be compared with the Liberal parties of other countries and certainly not with the Liberal Party of this country. It has not the same social composition as these foreign parties. Despite the growth of Socialism, it has continued to draw into its wake a great part of the petty bourgeoisie, the peasants, the shopkeepers, the Government employees, in short, of the " third estate." At the same time it has attracted certain elements of the middle bourgeoisie and even some members of the upper middle and commercial classes, who have retained their Republican convictions. Naturally, this latter category has become increasingly Conservative as class antagonisms have grown.

These various categories making up the Radical Party had until recently certain ideas in common to which they remained solidly attached ; they were Republican, believing in the political forms of democracy, in the neutrality of the State in religious questions, to the extent of being obstinately anti-clerical.

Their economic doctrines were vague. They proclaimed themselves to be individualists, based on the principles of the French Revolution, and aiming at the " emancipation of labour " and " freer access to property for the working masses." These formulæ are a little empty. And if truth

be told, the social ideas of the Radicals varied with the individuals who held them. It has indeed been said that Radicalism in France was above all "an attitude of mind." The Radicals are a party without any very rigid discipline, looking upon Government as their natural vocation and accepting only with great difficulty the idea of a Government in which they are not represented. When they are strong enough, they govern alone, with Socialist support. If their strength does not permit this, they drift into collaboration with the "moderate" parties. Their party expects always to hold the Ministry of the Interior, where it can keep a grip on the Prefects and continue to render personal services to its numerous electoral clientèle. That the Socialist Party in 1936 should have wrested from it the leading position among the parties of the Left seemed to the Radicals to constitute the gravest of injustices.

The variety of its composition has left the Radical Party for some years now with two clearly distinguishable currents within it. There were the left-wing Radicals, the true Socialist-Radicals, favouring bold measures of social reform and going as far as to demand the nationalisation of *de facto* monopolies. Although in principle opponents of collectivism, they were warm believers in alliance with the Socialists. The Left *bloc* seemed to them not merely a temporary necessity, but the normal form of Republican government. In the past this tendency was represented by men like Léon Bourgeois, Emile Combes, Camille Pelletan and Ferdinand Buisson.

The right-wing Radicals, on the other hand, were violently anti-Socialist, opponents of civil service trade unionism, who allied themselves for preference with the moderate Republicans. Clemenceau became the incarnation of this type of Radical during his first Premiership, when he found himself opposed by Jaurès and the Socialists. But the typical right-wing Radical is Joseph Caillaux, and that despite any illusions he may have created before 1914, when he defended the idea of Franco-German friendship against our nationalists and advocated the introduction of an income tax. During his later years he had become a leading defender of the Senate, forgetting how he had condemned it during

the last war. Under his influence the Radicals of the Upper House had become Conservative and even reactionary.

The most representative figure of French Radicalism, the man who most successfully sought to conciliate the contradictory tendencies of his party, was Edouard Herriot.[1] To speak of Herriot is to pass in review fifteen years of the history of French Radicalism, and it is perhaps not undesirable that a primarily individualist party should be studied through the personalities of the men who have represented it, have enjoyed its confidence and embodied its policies.

In speaking of the most recent years, one cannot keep rigidly to the divisions between right-wing and left-wing Radicalism. Even before Munich, the party was riddled with contradictions; men of its left-wing moved over to the right and vice versa. A man like Herriot, who was regarded as a right-wing Radical when he was collaborating with the so-called Ministries of National Union, was always revealed as a left-winger whenever there arose, either in foreign or in domestic policy, a question of vital moment to French democracy. And Daladier, for long considered to be a man of the Left, was supported with compliant obedience by the Right for over two years. As for Chautemps, oscillating between Left and Right, he represented in his own person all the faults that led the Radical Party along the path of capitulations, up to and including the last great capitulation.

EDOUARD HERRIOT.

Let us begin with Herriot. None would deny that Edouard Herriot is the most attractive of the Radical leaders. He is a man of great charm, always open to new ideas, profoundly artistic, with a prodigious culture, served by a faultless memory. As a writer, a historian, a literary and musical critic, he has won the respect of the élite of the modern world. He has a gift of eloquence which puts

[1] The work of Maurice Sarraut may be compared with that of Herriot. A man of great modesty, director of the greatest French Radical daily, the *Dépêche de Toulouse*, and brother of Albert Sarraut, he was always refused ministerial office, but has none the less always exercised a great influence on the Radical Party, whose President he was for some years.

him among the greatest of orators. To appreciate this gift at its best, one has to hear him improvising an after-dinner speech. His melodious voice gilds his words, the periods flow on harmoniously, and from time to time there emerges some piece of poetic imagery that seems to have been inspired by all that is most perfect in the Greco-Latin heritage.

There are, of course, defects; a rather naïve taste for popularity, a touch of ego-centricity, an exaggerated sensitiveness to criticism. And often, far too often, a hesitancy in decision that has prevented him from becoming the great statesman that his unparalleled gifts might have made of him.

In 1924 he presided over the Ministry of the *Cartel des Gauches*, the coalition of Left parties that won the election of May of that year. His domestic policy was at first bold, his foreign policy far-sighted. He wisely wound up the Ruhr operation, re-established good relations with England and became the author of the Geneva Protocol which aimed at establishing a peace based on security, arbitration and disarmament. But he soon encountered the opposition of finance and capitalism. Caught in the stranglehold of the directors of the Bank of France, he had not the courage to take the energetic measures advised by the Socialists and was defeated by the Senate. A year later, in 1926, when Caillaux asked for powers to govern by decree and exercise a kind of financial dictatorship, Herriot came down from the Speaker's chair on to the floor of the Chamber in order to attack and defeat the project. But when his own short-lived Government had followed and been defeated and he gave place to Poincaré, he saw no reason for refusing to accept office in a Government claiming to be one of national union, but whose real aim was social and economic conservatism, and offered as his excuse that France was in grave danger, that "*la mère est malade*," "our mother, France, is sick," and that the Radical Party was in the first place a national party. Yet when in 1928 Poincaré was preparing measures that savoured of clericalism, Herriot attacked him, and accepted the decision of the Angers Congress of his party, which, cleverly

managed by Daladier, demanded his resignation from the Government. In 1932 he formed a Radical Ministry, but left office after a few months rather than yield to the Chamber and refuse payment of the American Debt. For him the pledged word of France is sacred, the country must accept its obligations and never renounce its signature. Against both the Socialists and the Right he courageously maintained his position and was defeated.

After February 6th, 1934, just as in 1926, he felt it his duty to enter a Cabinet of national union, under Gaston Doumergue. But when the latter sought to remould the Constitution and give it an authoritarian trend, he brought about his downfall. And if later on he accepted office under Flandin and then under Laval, he nevertheless tried to oppose the latter on his foreign policy during the Italo-Abyssinian affair, and in the end it was thanks to his personal action that Laval was defeated at the beginning of 1936.

He was never very enthusiastic about the Popular Front, fearing especially its boldness in economic and financial policy. But he understood the meaning and importance of a movement directed against Fascism, which he hates, and agreed once more to become President—Speaker—of the Chamber. The first Blum Government had no more faithful supporter, Blum himself no more devoted friend. All the same, after the fall of the Blum Cabinet, it became desirable that Herriot should re-enter the field of active politics. He had the authority that would have permitted him to form a Ministry of real national unity. Blum begged him to do so. He hesitated. At bottom, and although he denied it, he hoped to become President of the Republic. The time for a new Herriot Government passed, but the Presidency of the Republic also escaped him, for Daladier was able by adroit manœuvre to arrange for the re-election of Lebrun.

At the time of Munich he disapproved of Daladier and Bonnet, but refused to do anything startling. He dare not come out openly against a policy on which the Radicals had embarked us. If we turn to the last hours of the Republic, we find him fighting hard at Tours and Bordeaux against capitulation, and making even desperate efforts to

prevent it. But when the crime had been committed, the spectre of the "sick mother" haunted him again, and he saw it as his duty to avoid open conflict with Pétain.

This ungarnished statement of facts enables one, I think, to understand Herriot, with his qualities of moral and intellectual probity, his hesitations and scruples. He is capable of sudden surges of energy when the Republic is in danger, or when the cause of France is at stake. But his conception of duty is such that he is often led to surrender to his opponent in the belief that he is thereby serving the best interests of his country. That is why Herriot, superior in the breadth and depth of his culture to a Roosevelt or a Churchill, will never find a place in history comparable to theirs. He has always lacked the fierce energy, the sustained tenacity, the speed of decision that alone make great leaders, and which, all things considered, are of greater value in times of crisis than the widest range of intelligence or the greatest gifts of the mind.

## 2. THE SINS OF DALADIER

### The Man.

The case of Daladier is very different from that of Herriot. Like the latter, he is a teacher. He is even a former pupil of Herriot, but a pupil who detests his master, whom he in no way resembles. Though highly educated, Daladier does not give one the impression of a man of culture. He is a short, red-faced man, sombre and even sulky. Of charm he has none. Those who admire him have been attracted by his appearance of energy, and have called him "the bull of Vaucluse." But a little experience of his habits has taught them that when he bangs on the table with his fist it is a sign that he is preparing to give way. He is a weak man—a weak man who, as became clear in the days before Munich, is not without sound impulses, but who rarely gives way to them. He is full of good intentions, but rather withdrawn, and not wholly free of a tendency to duplicity and intrigue.

FROM 1928 TO 1938.

At first he was on the extreme left of the Radical Party. At the Angers Congress in 1928 it was he who compelled Herriot to leave the Government. But by 1933 he was beginning to flirt with some of the politicians of the Right. As Prime Minister for a few months, he practised, as had all the Radical leaders, a policy of deflation, which aggravated the economic crisis, wages falling in the wake of those of Government servants. It was, moreover, a policy that favoured the anti-Parliamentary campaigns against Ministerial instability, since the Socialists, as Daladier must have known, were compelled to defeat a Cabinet attached to so indefensible a policy.

Then came 1934. We will not go over again the affair of February 6th. We saw how Daladier formed a Left Government only when he failed to achieve a coalition with the Centre. We saw how on the 7th he capitulated to the rioters. In 1935 the Popular Front found in him a vigorous supporter, all the more so as he expected to become the head of the Government after the elections. The victory of the Socialists and the accession to office of Léon Blum must have been in the highest degree irritating to him.

Under the Blum Government he intrigued in the lobbies, but remained mostly silent during Cabinet discussions. Contrary to what has been hinted by his friends, he raised no objection to the social laws, nor to non-intervention in the Spanish War. As Minister of National Defence, he clung jealously to his prerogatives. He claimed to reserve for himself complete control in military matters; in fact he retained only the right to leave things to the General Staff, whose instrument he was.

1938 AND 1939.

When he became Prime Minister in April, 1938, after the fall of the second Blum Cabinet, it was already with the intention of governing with the Right against the Socialists. By summer his attitude on social questions had led to the resignation of two Ministers, Paul Ramadier and L. O. Frossard, both former members of the Socialist

Party, who had become independents. Then came Munich, which gained for him the dithyrambic praises of the Right and the Fascists, and after Munich the strike of November 30th. This gave him an excellent opportunity to break definitely with the trade unions and to become the head of a " strong " Government, supported by the most reactionary elements of the French bourgeoisie, who hoped to compel him to destroy the edifice of the social laws by persuading him that they were an obstacle to national defence. From the point of view that interests us here, the result was that the working class withdrew into itself, never put its whole heart into national defence or gave its full collaboration to the efforts for national unity.

Daladier suited the reactionaries all the more because he was a Radical. He, at least, could not be accused of being a reactionary. And the Radical Deputies, who dare not disavow their leader, with very few exceptions, supported the Government. But after March 15th Daladier changed his foreign policy. In spite of one or two unfortunate remarks that appear to have escaped him about " Czechia," he felt that resistance to the dictators had become necessary. The patriot in him—for patriot he undoubtedly is, even if he is not the jacobin he pretends to be—was at last awakened. Up to the outbreak of war his attitude was almost irreproachable, and in the last hours he showed great coolness as well as courage in imposing silence on Bonnet and the defeatists. And it is to this fact that he owes to-day his trial by the Court of Riom, at the instigation of the puppets of Vichy under the orders of Hitler.

During the war, on the other hand, how many reproaches he incurred! For lack of irrefutable evidence, I will say nothing of foreign policy. But I am obliged to take into account some of his remarks in Parliamentary Commissions and certain pieces of information confided to me by his friends, from which it would appear to emerge that Daladier never wholly abandoned the idea of a compromise peace. I will say no more than that.

One may nevertheless be permitted, without being accused of ill-will towards a man whom none would desire to weigh down still further in his present situation, to say that the

way in which he chose to govern helped to discredit the Republic and the Parliamentary régime. I cannot say too frequently that the Fascists of Vichy have been extraordinarily ungrateful to Daladier!

## Decline of Republican Sentiment.

In the first place, he is not fundamentally either a Republican or a Democrat. It is a striking fact that he rarely appealed in his speeches to democracy and never pronounced the word "Republic." What a difference from the last war, when no leader, from Viviani to Clemenceau, ever failed to equate the country with its system of government. It may be said that I am quibbling over words. But it is much more than that. The absence of certain words from his speeches had a symbolic value. Daladier was turning to Fascism, poured out threats against the Deputies and Senators, wanted to govern always by decree, and became impatient of any attempt at supervision by the Chambers. Moreover, he disliked Parliamentary debates. Himself not a great debater, he preferred corridor intrigue, in which he excelled, to full sessions of the Chamber. And so he emasculated Parliament and Parliament allowed itself to be emasculated. If our Chamber and Senate had understood their function as did those of 1914–18, or as does the British Parliament to-day, France might still have been intact.

In the same way, Daladier's anti-Communist policy merits the severest criticism. To take measures against agitators capable of sabotaging national defence is one thing—though even there the police do not appear to have been either over-scrupulous or over-intelligent; I know of Socialists persecuted during the anti-Communist roundups, who had nothing whatever to do with Communism. But the dissolution of the Communist Party and the exclusion of Communist Deputies from the Chamber are quite another thing. The dissolution of the party was illegal, and was open to the further objection that it reduced the Communist party-workers to clandestine activity and gave them an aura of martyrdom. As for the exclusion of

the Deputies, no argument can justify it; it was an illegal and unconstitutional measure. If there were any charges to be brought against the Communist Deputies, they should have been arrested. If they had then been convicted of treason, they should have been shot. But nobody had the right, without any trial, to deprive them of their Parliamentary prerogatives and leave their constituents unrepresented. In Great Britain, the attitude of the Government and the Chambers in this matter was never understood and it is perhaps as well. It was a scandal that the majority of the Socialists, against the advice of Léon Blum, of Marx Dormoy, of Marius Moutet, should have dared to vote for measures that *opened the road to the suppression of Parliament*. As for arguing that the Communist Party was a foreign party, this might have had some validity if there had been none of the accomplices of Hitler and Mussolini among those who voted for the expulsion of the Communist Deputies, or if one of the leaders of these anti-Communists had not been called Pierre Etienne Flandin, the author of the telegram of congratulation to Hitler.

Daladier, then, emasculated Parliament and helped to discredit the Republican and democratic régime. And these crimes have to be added to the earlier ones—February 7th, Munich, blind acceptance of the stupidities of the General Staff. I was not overstating the case when I gave to this chapter the title of " The Sins of Daladier."

## 3. CHAUTEMPS AND THE CAPITULATIONIST MENTALITY

### The Career of Chautemps.

Camille Chautemps did not play a part as important as that of Daladier. But his case must be studied, because he is a typical example—the most brilliant example—of the Radical politicians who led France and the Republic to disaster, of all those who placed above attachment to principle the too frequent indulgence of a taste for compromise and manœuvre.

Chautemps is Republican by family tradition. His father

was a Minister of the Republic, and he is surrounded by relatives who have belonged to the political personnel of the Republic. From his earliest years he was a Radical Party worker and a Freemason. He is indeed a high official of the latter organisation, which has now been dissolved by the Vichy Government, though that Government continues to entrust Chautemps with missions abroad. None will deny Chautemps' intelligence and ability. He has a quick mind and his speeches have intelligence and lucidity; indeed his attractive gift of speech and harmonious and well-modulated voice are not the least dangerous of his attributes. Coming of a Savoy family, Chautemps represents in the Senate one of the Departments of Touraine. Touraine is a region in which mind and landscape alike are characterised by balance and moderation, and these qualities are personified in Chautemps. He hates extremes. To hold the balance between Right and Left, or rather to be oneself a man of the Left, while maintaining discreet contacts with the Centre-Right, such is his ideal of political wisdom. He excels in lobby intrigue, in carefully calculated manœuvres, in the formation of coalition Ministries in which Party representations are counted out by this Radical lawyer as minutely and carefully as the ingredients of a chemist's prescription. He represents the least defensible characteristics of French Parliamentary life, and in that he is not without a certain resemblance to Pierre Laval. Except that he has at least kept the memories of his classical education, and can still produce a well-turned phrase.

Minister of the Interior in 1924, the holder of various Cabinet offices since, he was always regarded as one of the pinkest of the Radicals. Yet he became the victim of the reactionaries whom he had never fought except with a buttoned foil. In the chapter on French Fascism, I mentioned the Stavisky affair and told how the Fascists on that occasion made a scapegoat of Chautemps. Throughout the year 1934 he was most abominably slandered, his opponents even going so far as to pretend that Judge Prince, who had quite simply committed suicide, had been assassinated by Camille Chautemps and his unfortunate brother-in-law, the eminent M. Pressard. Chautemps stood up with

dignity to the storm. But when his innocence had been recognised and publicly proclaimed, he had only one desire—to seek the favour of his enemies, to be again in the good graces of those who had done all they could to ruin him. And there is no doubt that he is very good at that kind of thing.

FROM MARCH 7TH, 1936, TO SPAIN.

Having again achieved office, before the elections of 1936 in the Cabinet of Albert Sarraut, he was one of the majority of the Cabinet that opposed mobilisation on March 7th, after the re-occupation of the Rhineland. It should, however, be pointed out in mitigation of this offence that the number of those, either in the Government or in the country, who saw the right path on that occasion was infinitesimal. In the Cabinet meeting that made the decision, only Albert Sarraut, Georges Mandel, Paul-Boncour and the Radical, Henri Guernut unequivocally demanded immediate mobilisation. It was the representatives of the defence forces who were the most lamentable and yet had their way. They were General Maurin, Minister of War, François Piétri, Minister of Marine, and Marcel Déat, Air Minister. . . .

In June, he became Vice-Premier in the Blum Cabinet. Without setting out frankly to torpedo the Ministry, at any rate at the beginning, he began again to cultivate the Right, and especially Pierre Laval. He did all he could to prevent the Popular Front from purusing an anti-Fascist foreign policy. Like Laval, he dreamed of collaboration with Hitler and Mussolini. We have already seen how he worked hard to set the Government on the road to non-intervention. If the majority of the Radicals had an unfortunate attitude in the Spanish affair, Chautemps is to a great extent responsible for it.

THE RADICALS AND THE CAGOULARDS.

When he replaced Léon Blum in the Premiership in June, 1937, his accession to this office was hailed by the Right as the beginning of a return to a " sane " Conservative tradition.

But he was not completely master of the situation ; Léon Blum was Vice-Premier, Marx Dormoy, Minister of the Interior, and Vincent Auriol, Minister of Justice. Working in close collaboration, Dormoy and Auriol were demanding of police and magistrates that the criminals of the Cagoulard organisation should be mercilessly sought out and prosecuted. Light began to be shed on these scandalous and foreign-inspired manifestations of terrorist Fascism. For two months, thanks to the searches and inquiries of the police, every day brought a new discovery. But when in January the Socialists refused office in the second Chautemps Cabinet, the zeal of those in charge of the inquiries noticeably slackened. When Dormoy again became Minister of the Interior in March, much of the scent was cold. Later Daladier, as Prime Minister, undertook to hush up the affair, and one after another he had the leading prisoners released. Here is the best proof, better than the most ingenious argument, of the complicity, direct or indirect, of some of the Radical leaders in the crimes of French Fascism.

### Towards Capitulation.

But to return to Chautemps. In the Daladier Cabinet, he was Deputy-Premier without portfolio. He had been kept away from the Foreign Office because of his tendency to be conciliatory towards dictators. To him was preferred Georges Bonnet. But let no mistake be made. Camille Chautemps also would have gone to Munich. The only difference would have been that instead of murdering Czechoslovakia with a butcher's knife, as Bonnet did, Chautemps would have killed her with a skilful thrust of his Toledo blade, executed with all the delicate grace of a Castilian toreador.

During the war little was heard of him. It was known that he was among the pacifists in the councils of the Government, but that was all. It was no surprise to learn that during the last days he was one of the capitulationists, while his Radical colleagues, Campinchi and Yvon Belbos, were demanding resistance. What was more surprising was

that, with all his Republican traditions, he should agree to serve in the Pétain Cabinet and dig the grave of the Third Republic to which he owed everything. What was worse was that he continued to serve when Pétain had definitely gone Fascist, even though the latter had dropped him from the Cabinet in his first reshuffle.

I am fully convinced that Chautemps has no love for Fascism, that he would much have preferred to continue his intrigues in the corridors and lobbies of a Parliament. But he knows how to adapt, or in other words how to yield to force. And his example shows where one can be led by a love of conciliation at any price, by a morbid desire to meet one's opponents half-way, an unhealthy love of political machination.

How many minor Chautemps' one met in the Radical Party! There was Jean Mistler, President of the Foreign Affairs Commission; there was Lucien Lamoureux, several times Minister of Finance—and so many others, all engaged in a perpetual flirtation with the Right, all anxious to apply in foreign policy their habit of concession, so that they supported first Munich, then the policy of "no commitments outside the Empire," then a more or less defeatist pacifism which led them by natural and easy stages into acceptance of capitulation. And even now I have not mentioned one or two Radicals who were nothing less than the allies of the Fascists—such, for instance, as the despicable Jean-Louis Malvy, intimate friend of Chiappe.

These pen-pictures of the more prominent members of the Radical Party may perhaps seem a little long. It must, however, again be pointed out that we are dealing with a party of individualists and that this trip through the Radical portrait gallery therefore leaves the reader free to draw his own conclusions. I believe that when he has read it he will think, as I do, that a single adjective suffices to describe the responsibilities of the Radical Party for the present misfortunes of France: they are overwhelming.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE FINAL HOUR

### 1. PARIS, TOURS, BORDEAUX

We have now seen how there arose the conditions that made possible the assassination of France. And so we come to the tragedy itself. I cannot claim here to give all the details, nor to write down a complete account of the capitulation. My sole aim is to transmit certain impressions, to recall a few facts, while trying as far as possible to recreate the atmosphere of the concluding hours.

The Flight from Paris.

On Sunday, June 9th, I had gone again for a visit to Ouchy-le-Château. As I indicated in the first chapter, I had found men desperate with fatigue, but anxious to continue resistance. When I returned to Paris that evening the atmosphere was full of the anxiety of evil days. We had not yet reached the disordered flight of defeat, but in Ministries and newspaper offices there were whisperings of despair and preparations for departure the next day. Everyone knew that the Germans were approaching, that since the crossing of the Somme and the arrival of motorised units at Forges-les-Eaux two days earlier, the Nazis had made real progress. The rumour ran that there was fighting along the Seine, not far from Paris.

On the Monday the Ministries were evacuating, the journalists were packing their things. In the evening at the Quai d'Orsay everything suggested flight. The centre of Paris was half empty. In front of the cafés of the rue Royale and the boulevards, normally so noisy at cocktail time, one could count the customers. But in the neigh-

bourhood of the Gare St. Lazare after nightfall one could sense in the darkness a strange animation, one brushed against groups of refugees who, sometimes half-dead with fatigue, had dropped on to the pavement and gone to sleep, men, women and children, leaning against a shop-window. Then, about ten o'clock in the evening, there began to spread through the atmosphere an odour of smoke and powder that gripped the throat and came from none knew where.

I had intended to stay in Paris, hoping to carry on there my profession of war correspondent. But during the night I learned that nearly all the official services were leaving Paris, including the press-service of the General Staff to which we were attached. I left on Tuesday at midday by the best available means of transport, and I have no intention of telling here the story of my adventures. I shall pick out only what is relevant to my subject, beginning with the impression of hopelessness that one had left behind in Paris.

The Government had undertaken to keep the population informed of the course of events. It failed to keep its promise. Its departure was too much like a flight. On the Tuesday morning I wandered on foot through Paris, seeking a car to take me along the road to Tours. I was in a dead city; passers-by were rare, and the underground and buses had stopped running. The smell of smoke and powder still gripped one's throat, while a thick fog made it impossible to see beyond a few yards. On the roads, on the other hand, cars were passing at high speed, but they were full of travellers and luggage and all moving towards one or other of the gates of the capital. I went towards the Ministry of the Interior. Two policemen were on guard in front of its closed gates. At the Invalides, the Headquarters of the Military Governor of Paris, where I went later in the morning, the courtyard was packed with dispatch riders. In the officers' quarters there was a continual coming and going of officers and messengers. All seemed to have been taken by surprise, and the impression of disorder was striking. I began to feel the first sensations of defeat.

Yet I still did not suspect for a moment that Paris was

not to be defended. I left the town with the certainty—rather naïve, I admit—that I should soon return as a war correspondent. It was only on Thursday, the 13th, at Tours, where I had arrived after a somewhat eventful journey, that I learned the news; Paris had been declared an open town, its defence abandoned.

### TOURS AND THE CAPITULATIONISTS.

At Tours, moreover, I learned much more news, all equally depressing. People everywhere were beginning once more to talk of surrender. Rumours of what was happening in the meetings of the Cabinet filtered through to the outside. It was discussed in the great hall of the school in which the Chamber and the Senate had found a temporary home. But there was talk of it also in the cafés and even in the street. All the details were not yet known, but everyone knew that a dramatic session of the Cabinet had been held in the suburbs of Tours on the night of the 12th–13th, and that Paul Reynaud had not yet won his struggle with the capitulationists. Pétain wanted to surrender. This was no more than half a surprise, but Weygand was with him and that surprised us more, so deep-rooted was the legend cultivated by his friends. It was at Tours, it will be remembered, that the Commander-in-Chief spoke the words that reveal him for ever for what he is; it was there that he demanded that the divisions of fresh troops should be kept back *to maintain order at home.*

It will be remembered also that it was at Tours that there was some question of setting up a bridgehead in Brittany, and I have pointed out in the first chapter how General de Gaulle and Georges Mandel urged this project. Mandel had made all arrangements for transferring the seat of Government to Quimper. But the defeatists won, and the move to Bordeaux began. My colleague, Charles Gombault, one of the most experienced of lobby correspondents, has contributed to an American periodical a story of that day that is worth repeating here. One evening at Tours, de Gaulle was insisting to Reynaud that the decision to

move to Brittany should be taken immediately. Reynaud hesitated, checked by the opposition of his friend Hélène de Portes, who exercised over him a deplorable influence. The decision was postponed until the following day. Throughout the night, de Gaulle worked on in Reynaud's office, and Reynaud returned in the morning with Mme de Portes, with whom he began a discussion, the two of them sitting on the corner of a table, while de Gaulle discreetly looked out of the window. Finding that the whispered discussion was being prolonged, de Gaulle decided to leave the office. As he reached the door, Reynaud called him back. "Oh, by the way," he said, "the Quimper plan—it's off."

I dislike the idea of bringing up in the course of a political discussion the details of anybody's private life, and the reader will admit that so far I have scrupulously refrained from doing so. But the liaison between Paul Reynaud and Hélène de Portes (since killed in a car accident) and the unfortunate influence she exercised over him were matters of public knowledge. It was she who introduced the capitulationists into his circle, she who tried to turn him from the proper path and suggested to him some of the unfortunate measures for which he was responsible.

### The Capitulation of Bordeaux.

The transfer of the seat of Government took place then, but to Bordeaux, not to Quimper. A few hours in this great city of South-Western France was quite enough to reveal what were the plans of the defeatists. At Bordeaux, everything suggested disorder, collapse, panic. Refugees were pouring in from all sides, packing the streets, the squares, the café terraces. Interminable rows of cars blocked the roads, so that the whole city was just a swarming mass of saddened but still noisy humanity. And in the cafés and the public rooms of hotels the defeatists were busy spreading all kinds of alarmist rumours with none to stop them. For it must be remembered that we were in Bordeaux, where Adrien Marquet is Mayor.

ADRIEN MARQUET.

Adrien Marquet is a dental surgeon who entered politics as a young man. Though now past his fiftieth year, he is still a handsome man and was long regarded as the Beau Brummel of the Socialist Party. He is a competent orator and has a high opinion of his own gifts. He thinks himself a man of unusual ability, and the fact that this view is shared only by a minority of those with whom he comes into contact in no way influences him. Some years ago he alarmed Léon Blum by launching the slogan, "Order, Authority, Nation," at a time when these were already Fascist watchwords, and he tried hard to turn into a Fascist Party the neo-Socialist party of which he was a co-founder. As a Minister under Doumergue, he put his Fascist theories to the test by terrorising his officials. In Bordeaux he did the same thing. A Mayor in France is not the figure-head he is in England, but the powerful and influential head of the municipal administrative machine. Marquet was an able Mayor and an honest administrator, but he terrorised his officials at the Town Hall. He was, as was to be expected, a pacifist during the present war and a defeatist towards the end. He wanted peace with Hitler and Mussolini and seems to have imagined—so colossal was his vanity—that if he became the Führer of France he would get the better of the two dictators and charm them with that flashing smile that so well advertised his own professional competence. How true it is that the most poignant of tragedies is never without its touch of farce.

Marquet kept a tight hand on his police force and Bordeaux was full of his henchmen. Mandel was Minister of the Interior, but here his writ scarcely ran. We began to realise more clearly than ever what a blunder the flight from Paris had been. On Saturday and Sunday, the 15th and 16th, the most improbable rumours ran through Bordeaux. News reached us only through devious channels that distorted it as it came. Thus, for instance, we heard of the presence of Winston Churchill, but not a word of his moving and generous offer of union with Great Britain.

GEORGES MANDEL.

Georges Mandel struggled as best he could against the capitulationists. General de Gaulle fought desperately for the idea of carrying on the fight from Africa. Both kept up an obstinate pressure on Reynaud, and their efforts were seconded by the resisters in the Cabinet, the Radicals, Campinchi and Yvon Delbos, the Socialists, Georges Monnet and Albert Sérol, the old Conservative, Louis Marin. And we must not forget the persistent efforts of Edouard Herriot, President of the Chamber, of Léon Blum, and of the President of the Senate, Jules Jeanneney, an old Jacobin Republican and former Minister of Clemenceau.

On the Sunday morning it seemed that all was not irreparably lost. I remember having met a former colleague of Paul Reynaud, then mobilised as an officer and now serving in the Free French Forces. He was exultant. "I have just been to see the boss," he said, "we're going to fight on." But the defeatists were at work. Pierre Laval arrived from Clermont Ferrand, and worked in close union with Marquet. The Mayor's office in Bordeaux had become the thieves' kitchen in which the surrender of France was being plotted. Marquet arranged for "spontaneous" demonstrations in the streets—pacifist demonstrations, of course, and directed against the resisters, now more than ever treated as warmongers. It is in circumstances such as these that revolutionary methods are called for. I am sure that Mandel considered this possibility.

Georges Mandel is a mysterious personage, or, at any rate, he likes to be thought one. He is stiff in manner, sententious, wears the high collar of the doctrinaire, mouths a little in speaking, and likes to strike terror with a freezing glance. He has acquired a reputation for machiavelianism and lack of feeling, and none of this is wholly pretence, for affectation is the least of his faults. But Mandel, once the *alter ego* of Clemenceau, is a patriot, a profoundly convinced patriot and deeply attached to the régime. Moreover, he has energy, besides others of the qualities that make men capable of governing. He certainly thought what great numbers of us thought during that sombre

Sunday: we must move quickly, arrest the capitulationists, strike hard and, above all, most important of all, strike quickly, drive Pétain from the Government, dismiss Weygand and appoint a new Commander-in-Chief.

Such a course was possible, even at Bordeaux, but on one condition, that Mandel could find sufficient support among his Cabinet colleagues. Paul Reynaud was not the man to take these revolutionary measures. Even the firmest resisters in the Cabinet were all, or nearly all, men rendered hesitant by misplaced scruples, over gentlemanly, in a word, weak. So, by evening, Pétain, Weygand and Baudouin had won. To win over his colleagues, Weygand declared that what was now only a beaten army would become a routed army if the struggle continued. He forgot, rather conveniently for him, that the way he had conducted the war during the previous eight days could not have been without influence on the morale of the army.

### The Cabinet Meeting of June 16th.

It has been said that the fateful decision was taken by thirteen votes to twelve. I have no means of checking the accuracy of this statement, but I doubt whether in fact any vote was taken. Voting at Cabinet meetings is not usual. What more probably happened was that it became clear that the majority was on the side of Weygand, and Reynaud and his supporters resigned. In any case, here, according to the information I have been able to gather, are the names of those who remained to the end supporters of continued resistance: Paul Reynaud, Georges Mandel, Campinchi, Yvon Delbos, Louis Marin, Georges Monnet, Albert Sérol and Dautry, the Minister of Armaments. There were also the Air Minister, Laurent Eynac, a moderate Radical, Jules Julien, one of Herriot's Radical friends, Louis Rollin, a Conservative Catholic, and Rio, the Minister of Shipping. And, of course, General de Gaulle must be added to the list; if his name has not been included with the others, it is because he was an Under-Secretary and as such not present at Cabinet meetings.

All the others were, no doubt, on the side of capitulation. At the head comes Paul Baudouin who, as Under-Secretary to the Prime Minister, must have had access to the meeting. We shall have something to say later of the rôle of this individual, as well as that of Ybarnégaray, a fellow capitulationist. Camille Chautemps takes a high place in the list, and with him are Pomaret, a super-Munichite, Bouthillier, Minister of Finance, and Jean Prouvost, Minister of Information.

Other Ministers and Under-Secretaries, weak men, allowed themselves to be manœuvred by the militant defeatists. Such were the independent Socialist, L. O. Frossard and his Under-Secretary, the Socialist André Février, as well as another Socialist, Albert Rivière, Minister of Pensions. The Radical, Chichery, is in the same category, with, I imagine, the reactionary Catholic, Georges Pernot.

## 2. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PAUL REYNAUD

I hurry over the rest of this episode, the most shameful in the history of France. After the resignation of Reynaud, there is little of importance to be said about the request for an armistice, the whining letter of Pétain in which he asked for an honourable peace between soldiers, or his radio speech, the death certificate of the victor of Verdun. Nor is anything gained by detailed examination of the public and private manifestations of the defeatist Fascists, or the manœuvres of capitulationist Ministers like Ybarnégaray, who for some days had been negotiating with the Spanish Ambassador, Lequerica. What, on the other hand, is important is the distribution of responsibilities, and under this head must come a special section on Paul Reynaud.

### Who and What is Reynaud?

Reynaud is in many ways an attractive person. Highly talented, he is a clear and accurate speaker and an excellent lawyer, with a mind open to all types of problem. He has

high intellectual qualities and is capable of high moral ones. I cannot forget having seen him disavow the members of his party in their persecution of the unfortunate Roger Salengro in 1936.

He had been for a very long time well versed in foreign policy. Though a Conservative, he was in no way blinded by class prejudice and recognised the danger of Fascism from the beginning. He worked against Laval's Italian policy and has always been a far-sighted opponent of Hitlerism. He is in addition a Republican and sincerely attached to the Parliamentary régime. Yet with it all he remains a *grand bourgeois*, with many friends in financial circles, and open to influences not always desirable. I have discussed this general point in an earlier chapter. I believe that he did not fully realise how much the French Fascists had lost their national spirit. And although he was determined on a vigorous prosecution of the war, although his accession to office was welcomed with relief by all those who had watched with growing alarm as the Daladier policy revealed itself as one of impotent drift, nevertheless it was clear that he showed a strange blindness in his choice of colleagues during the last few months.

### THE WRONG MEN.

On May 10th, when the offensive was launched, Paul Reynaud decided to widen the basis of his Cabinet. He brought in Louis Marin and made him a member of the War Cabinet. This was an excellent choice. But what possessed him to bring in also, and with the same access to inner councils, Jean Ybarnégaray, who was not merely a member of the *Croix de Feu* and friend of Colonel de la Rocque, but also an impenitent supporter of Franco? It is true that Ybarnégaray called himself anti-German, but elementary caution should have led to a certain mistrust of a man who defended so passionately Hitler's friends, the Spanish rebels. Later events proved that circumspection would not have been misplaced. His presence in the Cabinet, moreover, was in no way a source of strength, for his reputation in Parliament was very low.

Again, this broad-based Cabinet had apparently no room for Léon Blum, the leader of the biggest party in the Chamber. Why? Certainly not because of any personal enmity. Reynaud's relations with Léon Blum were of the friendliest. No, the sole purpose of this exclusion was to avoid a clash with the Right. And when a number of Socialists reproached Reynaud with the inclusion of Ybarnégaray without any counter-balancing representative of the Left, the Premier replied that these were trivial points in such circumstances. In fact, it was he who failed to realise what was important and what was not. It was not a question of balancing Right and Left; the choice of Marin, I repeat, was an excellent one; but by including a Fascist and friend of Franco like Ybarnégaray, Reynaud, as he should have known, was risking bringing a defeatist into the Government.

On May 18th, after the first defeats, Reynaud took over the War Ministry himself and handed over to Daladier that of Foreign Affairs. There is nothing to be said against this. It was quite proper that Daladier, with his share in the responsibilities of the General Staff, should leave the Ministry of National Defence. The appointment of Georges Mandel to the Ministry of the Interior was, in the same way, more than a good move, it was a measure of public safety. But what a reckless blunder it was to entrust the Deputy-Premiership to Pétain! Prestige may have its own importance, but the qualities and defects of a man surely have more. And nobody was unaware of the fact that Pétain, besides being inclined to pacifism, had none of the intellectual vigour of a young man. On the unwisdom of choosing Weygand as Commander-in-Chief, I will add nothing here to what I have already said in the earlier pages of this book. I must, however, point out in passing that another blunder was the dismissal of Alexis Léger from the Quai d'Orsay, where he had worked, despite all the efforts of Georges Bonnet, against the policy of appeasement. I pass to June 6th.

It is here that Reynaud's bad psychology, his weakness in choosing men is most clearly revealed. Wise choices sat side by side with the most deplorable ones.

One is reminded of the character in Victor Hugo, in whom,

> . . . le bien avec le mal alterne,
> Comme, dans le désert, le sable et la citerne.

He got rid of Daladier, and nothing could have been wiser. Daladier had intrigued ceaselessly against his chief. The same applies to de Monzie, pacifist and Munichite. But why should he have kept Charles Pomaret, who was no less of a defeatist? Again, he asked another Munichite, Lucien Lamoureux, to leave the Ministry of Finance—a perfectly sound move. But why replace him by the ultra-reactionary official, Bouthillier, of whom it was easy to guess that he would be at his weakest in a moment of crisis? Why drag in Jean Prouvost, proprietor of *Paris-Soir*, to begin his political apprenticeship in circumstances which called for men of experience and high courage?

Nor is that all. Yvon Delbos was brought into the Cabinet, which was a very wise step, but Albert Sarraut, who had always been a die-hard anti-Fascist, was left out. Finally, two Under-Secretaries were appointed to assist Paul Reynaud, who had taken over both the Ministry of National Defence and that of Foreign Affairs. The Under-Secretary for National Defence was de Gaulle, whose views Reynaud, to his great credit, had for years defended, when none other could be found to do so. But who, on the other hand, was appointed to the Under-Secretaryship for Foreign Affairs? Who, indeed, but Paul Baudouin.

PAUL BAUDOUIN.

Reynaud's liking for Baudouin is one of the strangest sides of his character. As early as April 1st he had made him Under-Secretary to the Prime Minister and secretary of the War Cabinet. When, on June 6th, he was made Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, it was specified that this new office was in addition to the former ones. He remained, therefore, Under-Secretary to the Premier and secretary of the War Cabinet.

The appointment would have been inexplicable if one had

not known that unfortunate influences too often dominated Paul Reynaud. *Baudouin should have called forth the utmost mistrust.* He was known to be favourably disposed to Fascism and defeatist by nature. He is a former pupil of the celebrated Paris Polytechnic, the school for army officers and engineers, a former high official of the Finance Ministry (*inspecteur des finances*) and is still quite young, being only 46 years old. In 1926, after a period as an official in the immediate entourage of various Ministers, he went to the Bank of Indo-China, whose Managing-Director he became. Although regarded even then as a reactionary, he was appointed by Léon Blum to membership of the Managing Committee of the Exchange Equalisation Fund in March, 1937, from which he resigned ostentatiously, along with his colleagues, a few days before the Blum Government was defeated by the Senate. Soon after, his pro-Italian sympathies brought him again into prominence. During the winter of 1939, he was employed by Bonnet on a mysterious mission to Rome. I have heard people, even in England, trying to excuse this principal architect of the capitulation and of the betrayals that followed it, by saying that he is a mystic. A mystic indeed : no doubt he is, at any rate he is a militant Catholic whose fanaticism is all the greater for his being a neophyte, converted from Protestantism. He prides himself on his knowledge of religious and political philosophies, and writes vague articles in an obscure, pretentious and florid style. But that does not prevent him from bringing to everyday life a strong sense of the practical. He is a financier who has never lost sight of the interests of high capitalism and who is not lacking either in ability or in duplicity. He knows how to flatter statesmen in office, and even succeeded in convincing Paul Reynaud that he had renounced his former views on dictators and was one of the firmest partisans of resistance. With the defeats of June the real Baudouin was revealed. He fought bitterly against the resisters, including the Prime Minister, who had brought him into office. As one of the last meetings of the Cabinet was breaking up, a fellow Minister said to him, " I have seen men betray their leaders and benefactors before, but I have never seen any to equal you."

REYNAUD'S FURTHER BLUNDERS.

Thus it was Reynaud himself who put the defeatists in office, and gave their chance to the Baudouins and Ybarné-garays, to say nothing of the Pétains and the Weygands. But this is not the only reproach that can be addressed to him. His internal policy was very little better than that of Daladier, its general tone not much more Republican. He also failed to understand that if a democracy is to wage war, its liberties and guarantees must be kept intact. His methods, it is true, were not the same as those of Daladier, and his intentions were better. He was not aiming at dictatorship, or even at omnipotence. He understood the need for national cohesion and introduced Socialists into his Cabinet. He accepted Parliamentary supervision without impatience. But when that has been said, it must be added that his respect for the fundamental laws of the Republic was only relative. Some of his decrees are open to serious criticism. Perhaps in order to appease the Right, which was accusing him of being too favourable to Russia, he arranged that the Minister of Justice should issue a decree allowing the imposition of the death sentence on Communists. The decree, moreover, was drafted in a manner that left the road open to the most serious abuses. And it is a sad thought that the Minister of Justice who agreed to issue it was none other than the Socialist, Albert Sérol.

I must add that the censorship was only a little more liberal under Reynaud than under Daladier. Incredible as the fact may be to our British and American friends, the French press was muzzled throughout the war by a censorship rigid in the extreme, more ridiculous than it was rigid, and more reactionary than it was ridiculous. Its tenderness towards the Fascists was carried to the length of censuring articles that criticised *Gringoire !* Under Reynaud it was perhaps less scandalously biased than under his predecessor, but the difference was only very slight.

The sum of these reproaches evidently constitutes a very grave condemnation. Have I overdrawn the picture ? I think not. I know that one must put to the credit of Paul Reynaud his very genuine patriotism, his determination

to resist, his farsightedness in foreign policy, his understanding of the nature of modern warfare. But there are very many defects and blunders to be put on the debit side of the balance-sheet. His appointments of men who were soon to be defeatists, his failure to create a truly democratic atmosphere, and above all, his lack of real energy during the crisis—these things cannot be forgotten.

Here again I feel all the scruples I expressed with regard to Daladier. It is painful to have to heap accusations upon the man whom the servants of Hitler are to place on trial before the court of Riom. But what was true of Daladier applies also to Reynaud. It is not for his mistakes that he is on trial; these would secure him the indulgence of his judges. The crime with which he is now charged constitutes the best part of his work, for it is his determination to defeat Germany.

When Great Britain and with her the cause of democracy have gained their victory, when France has had her new revolution, then the historian will be able to measure responsibilities in a calmer atmosphere. With all the evidence in his hands he will be able to judge whether those of Reynaud are greater than those of Daladier. For my own part, I prefer, for the time being, to withhold judgment.

## CHAPTER VII

# "WE, PHILIPPE PÉTAIN"

### 1. LAVAL BEHIND THE SCENES

PÉTAIN AND HIS MINISTRY.

IT now remains for us to see how, after the assassination of France, the Republic in its turn was murdered. Some of the men who capitulated did so with the sole aim of setting up a Fascist régime; others, who had endured the Republic and democracy only with impatience, felt that capitulation would at least make it possible to get rid of a régime they detested, and such a result, they felt, was by no means negligible.

This, admittedly, was not the position of *all* the Ministers of the first Pétain Cabinet. On the evening of June 16th, the Marshal had constituted a Cabinet which included those members of the previous Cabinet who had accepted the capitulation, either by conviction or simply because they were resigned to it. A minor reshuffle of offices was considered sufficient; Paul Baudouin became Minister of Foreign Affairs, a promotion no less "merited" than that of Charles Pomaret, who left the Ministry of Labour for that of the Interior. This young Minister, full of ambition, never ceased his defeatist work, both before and after Munich. Claiming to belong to the Left, he exercised a considerable sway over a number of influential Trade Unionists.

There were one or two new arrivals in the Government; Commander-in-Chief Weygand became Minister of War, Admiral Darlan, Minister of Marine. This latter nomination

caused some surprise, since the Admiral, an adroit politician, had succeeded in persuading some of the " resisting " Ministers that he was a die-hard among the die-hards. At the Air Ministry the Marshal placed one of his personal friends, General Pujo, who had also been a friend of General Dusseigneur, one of the leading Cagoulards. General Dusseigneur had many friends, especially among certain Air Force circles.[1]

At this point a few words must be said about Marshal Pétain, but first, perhaps, an apology is called for. I am writing as a historian and seek to hide nothing of the truth. Because the Marshal has rendered great services in the past, certain over-scrupulous persons deprecate too much insistence on his errors and crimes during the past few months. They would prefer that the effigy of this great soldier should remain decently veiled. My teachers at the Sorbonne—those who to-day are disgraced by the Pétain Government—taught me a different conception of history. *Magis amica veritas.*

Marshal Pétain was the victor of Verdun. He was a great and humane soldier, well loved by his troops. During the mutinies of 1917 he behaved admirably, visiting the regiments one after another and asking every man to voice his complaints freely. He prevented a great many executions and remedied the mistakes and abuses that had provoked the rebellions. All of which made of him the best loved and most respected leader in the French army. Is that a reason for not revealing, alongside the great Pétain, all the other Pétains, the mediocre and the hateful?

The temperament of Pétain offered but little resemblance to that of Foch. It has been claimed that he had been a defeatist during the later months of 1918. To say this of the saviour of Verdun is to go too far, but it is true that faith in victory had not become a part of his moral and physical being, that at moments he inclined towards a compromise peace. And this tendency grew with age, especially as age also left him more reactionary and increased his belief that the democratic régime could not bring victory. One cannot,

[1] There was, for instance, General Têtu, who has since helped to resist de Gaulle in the African colonies.

indeed, insist too much on this question of age. Pétain is an old man of eighty-four, who has never been a genius and whose faculties have long been falling off. As Ambassador to Spain he revealed incredible weaknesses, accepting without any compensating advantages all the conditions demanded by Franco, the vassal of Hitler and Mussolini. During the war he was known to be pessimistic. When he entered the Government and was called upon to face bad news, the pessimist became a defeatist, the more easily as the capitulationist thesis was defended by believers in "order," like Baudouin and Ybarnégaray.

After the capitulation the desire to set up a dictatorial régime came naturally to him, since it fitted so well into the framework of the rare ideas that still floated through his brain. Did he not declare in an interview granted during his Madrid mission, that the Salazar régime in Portugal seemed to him to be excellent ? And he went on to describe it with some enthusiasm ; quite clearly it was in his view the ideal régime. In general terms, he may be said to have dreamed of a kind of reactionary régime based on a Catholic and even clerical tradition, similar to the one MacMahon tried to impose on the country before he was broken in the attempt. There is indeed something of MacMahon in Pétain. But there is also something of Hindenburg, of that Hindenburg who opened the road to Hitler. And the régime he has now set up is inspired by something more than the former monarchist ideal : it has borrowed, under the influence of the Fascist Ministers, from the innovations of the Führer and the Duce, so that his system is inspired both by the Monarchy of pre-revolutionary France and by the corporatism of the totalitarian States. The mixture is a strange one, but the precise blend achieved mattered little to the alchemists who supervised the brew ; the essential was to kill democracy, to set up a personal government, to issue orders no longer in the name of the French Republic and the French people, but in the name of "We, Philippe Pétain, Head of the French State."

Philippe Pétain, the absolute sovereign ! The French must sometimes smile through their tears at the thought of this doddering octogenarian seeking to play the absolute

monarch, when in fact he exercises over a portion of France a power much less than that of the first Capetian kings in the eleventh century. In reality this would-be autocrat is no more than a poor vacillating puppet, bound hand and foot, and compelled to make the moves the Nazi conqueror dictates. Can one really refuse to regard this Pétain as a very different person from the hero of Verdun? Was I not justified in saying on an earlier page that the hero of Verdun died on June 16th, 1940, at Bordeaux?

But the establishment of the new régime and even the signature of the armistice would have been impossible without the work of a man who has not the excuse of senility and who can invoke no past services to his country as attenuating circumstances. The reader will have guessed that I am referring to Pierre Laval.

### Pierre Laval.

In the second chapter we saw how disastrous were the consequences of the foreign policy of Pierre Laval, who sabotaged the sanctions policy during the Italo-Abyssinian war and by that fact alone destroyed collective security, mortally injured the League, created a gulf between France and Great Britain and made possible Hitler's coup de force of March 7th, 1936. I shall not go over that story again. Indeed, an attempt to measure the full consequences of the Laval policy would require a book to itself. I hope that some day one of the diplomats who was in close contact with the events of 1935–36 will prepare the full indictment for posterity. But the policy itself cannot be understood without some knowledge of the man.

His origins were modest. His parents, small tradespeople at Châteldon, in the Department of Puy-de-Dôme, were able to give him a secondary education, from which he went on to study law. As a very young man he joined the Socialist Party, and when he had been called to the Bar specialised in Trade Union cases. As a result he came into close contact with the leaders of the G.G.T. Up to 1914 he belonged to the extreme left of the French workers' movement. But it was already clear to the more far-

sighted leaders that this able, cunning and tenacious man had the highest ambitions.

He became a Deputy in 1914 and was a pacifist throughout the war. Contrary, however, to what has been said of him, he never belonged to the "Kienthal"[1] group. His pacifist views were expressed always with prudence, in the corridors of the Chamber rather than at the Tribune. It was only when he had reason to believe, in 1917, that the majority of the Party was moving towards pacifism that he came out openly, in a highly emotional speech, in favour of the Stockholm Conference. It may be added by way of parenthesis that much nonsense has been written about this conference, a conference which never took place, and at which the French Socialists, who had all finally decided in favour of it, intended above all to attack the imperialism of the German majority Socialists. Apart from this occasion, the pacifism of Laval remained cautious, and he boasted in 1918 of being on good terms with both Caillaux and Clemenceau!

In 1920, when the Communists split off from the Party, he was careful not to take sides and remained in obscurity. It was whispered that he secretly held membership cards of both the Communist and Socialist Parties, but in fact he had joined neither. He was already planning his escape from the workers' movement. Defeated in the elections of 1919, elected as a Cartel representative in 1924, he entered the Painlevé Cabinet in 1925. Already he was moving more and more towards the Conservatives. If his clothes were still untidy and his manners unceremonious, if he continued to wear his usual white piqué tie, the clients who visited his chambers were different. He now had an extensive practice among the big industrialists, speculated a little perhaps, became rich and bought some property and a daily paper in Clermont-Ferrand. In 1927 he was sent to the Senate by reactionary votes and by 1930 had become one of the leaders of the French Right.

His ability cannot be denied. The skill with which he

[1] The Kienthal Congress of 1916 was attended by a number of anti-war Socialists of the extreme Left, from Pierre Brizon in France to Bolsheviks like Lenin.

has steered his political career is astonishing. But his ability is that of the Auvergne peasant who knows how to handle men and deal with them one at a time. He is neither a great orator nor even a great debater. His talent lies in his subtle artfulness, thanks to which he has been successful in the constituencies, in municipal life (he was for long Mayor of Aubervilliers, a big town in the outer suburbs of Paris), and lastly in Parliament.

His vanity and contempt for his fellow men are such that he has never doubted himself. He has come to believe that the possibilities of demagogy are infinite, he boasts with justice of being the greatest demagogue of them all. Why then should he not try in the diplomatic field the methods that have been so successful in domestic politics? Why should his peasant subtleties not succeed at Geneva and in the Chancelleries of Europe as they have done at Aubervilliers and Châteldon? So he treated the Abyssinian affair as he would have treated a quarrel in local politics. He saw that he could play alternately on Great Britain and Italy as in the Chamber he had played alternately on Radicals and Conservatives. And beyond all that, he was by no means displeased to appear as the champion of "pacifism." "Pacifism," indeed, is the one constant factor amid the multiple variations of his policy. And in so far as he is capable of sincerity, he is sincerely pacifist. Solutions achieved by force are foreign to his temperament, he seeks rather to circumvent his opponent, to lull him into a sense of security, to strangle him with an embrace.

His ignorance is proverbial. He has studied, but he is one of those who study only for utilitarian reasons, to pass examinations, and then hasten to forget all they have learnt. To read up the facts of a problem is not in his line. He governs by conversation, and in that he resembles somewhat Aristide Briand. But whatever he himself may think, he is a bad pupil of this great master. Briand was capable of noble sentiments, and his love of peace had nothing of cowardice. Briand was Prime Minister in 1916, at the time of Verdun. It is to him we owe the Salonika expedition. He had his faults and he made mistakes, notably in his attitude to the Socialist Party, which he abandoned

in order to take up Ministerial office, but he remained deeply attached to democracy, and in the later years of his life, having attained the serenity of a statesman, he seemed to be returning to the ideas of his youth.

Laval scarcely ever reads anything and writes even less. He is capable of spending hours in his study, smoking cigarettes, reading newspapers, working out some intrigue. Stories of his ignorance are legion, and one must suffice here. When he went to Rome in January, 1935, he knew nothing of Abyssinia, and the officials who accompanied him had the greatest difficulty in persuading him, a few hours before his arrival, even to look at a map of Africa.

Yet this ignorant trickster impressed the reactionary Senate. He explained that in supporting Mussolini—and later Franco—his only aim was to thwart Hitler, that if his advice had been followed, the Stresa policy would have been continued and Hitler isolated. But it was all one of his charlatan's tricks; in reality, he hoped for an arrangement with Hitler. Did he not say one day to one of his confidants, "If only I could see him, I'd soon make him laugh?"

In his anxiety to get the dictators on to his side, Laval gradually went over to their ideas. He became an anti-Parliamentarian and took up with the French Fascists. In the corridors he consorted with the rebels of February 6th. And if an example is desired of the influence exercised over him by Mussolini, one might perhaps quote the trial of the *Oustachis*, accused of the murder of King Alexander and Louis Barthou. I was present throughout the trial, and saw how the Presiding Judge and the prosecuting Counsel prevented the defence from making any allusion to Mussolini or to Italy. Yet the crime was one perpetrated by Italian Fascism. Ante Pavelitch, who had staged the crime, was living in Italy under the protection of Mussolini. But in January, 1935, when Laval had promised Abyssinia to Mussolini, he had been obliged to promise also to treat Mussolini gently in all circumstances.

Enough of the past. During the present war, Laval was discreetly pacifist, criticised the Government from the Tribune of the Senate, and awaited his time. When events

began to move rapidly, he left Clermont-Ferrand for Bordeaux. For those who have read an article written about him by the American journalist, Knickerbocker, it is easy to guess what were his feelings immediately before the capitulation. When Knickerbocker had reminded him that Hitler was seeking to ruin France, this small-town Machavelli had replied that he did not agree; the Führer wanted only to defeat Stalin.

PRETENCE OF GOING TO NORTH AFRICA.

It was, however, not until June 20th that the rôle of Laval was made clear to the world. Capitulation proved to be not so easy a matter as the old Marshal had supposed. Instead of the "peace between soldiers" he had so naïvely hoped for, Hitler offered him the most dishonourable of armistices. Herriot and Jeanneney used all their energy to urge the Government to resist, and succeeded in persuading the President to leave for North Africa. Pétain wanted to stay in France, but Lebrun, Herriot and Jeanneney were anxious to embark for Africa and form a Government there. It was in these circumstances that Daladier, Mandel, Campinchi and Delbos went aboard the *Massilia*, together with a number of Deputies and Senators, such as the Catholic reactionary, Joseph Denais, the former Radical Minister, Jean Zay, the Conservative Deputy, Wiltzer, the Socialist Pierre Viénot, formerly Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the Socialist, Salomon Grumbach, Vice-President of the Foreign Affairs Commission, both well-known for their courageous anti-Nazi attitude, and others, like the two Socialist Deputies, André le Troquer and Robert Lazurick. As is now well known, Jean Zay, Viénot and Wiltzer were later charged with desertion, Mandel and Daladier brought before the Riom Court and Grumbach arrested. The fact remains that on June 20th it had been agreed that Lebrun should go to North Africa, and that it was Laval who prevented his departure. Quite recently, an unsavoury personage of the name of Jean Montigny, who was Laval's chief censor, has claimed for his master the credit of having prevented the Pétain Government from resisting. In a book published

in November, under the title of, "The whole truth, a dramatic month in our history," Montigny explains, first that Paul Reynaud and Mandel tried, during the last few days before the change of Government and the request for an armistice, "to gain time against the majority of their colleagues by insisting that the Government accept the British plan of Franco-British Union and continue the war outside France." Reynaud and Mandel, he writes, "did not succeed in winning over the other Ministers, who felt that by accepting such a scheme, France would become a British Dominion!" Then, turning to the first days of the Pétain Ministry, Laval's mouthpiece explains that Jeanneney and Lebrun "did all they could to persuade their colleagues, the majority of the Cabinet, to leave for one of the French colonies and continue the war." "Marshal Pétain," he says, "energetically opposed the idea of leaving France," but he adds that, "on June 20th, President Lebrun's car was ready to leave for Port-Vendres, where a destroyer was waiting to take him to Alger." And Montigny goes on to tell how Laval "called together a large number of members of Parliament, with Chautemps at their head," and how, "the majority expressed their confidence in Marshal Pétain and their desire to remain in Bordeaux." Then comes the story of a dramatic interview between Lebrun and Laval on the 21st. Here is what the latter said to the President of the Republic. "You have the right to go to Alger, but only in a personal capacity. Do not listen to those who are pushing our country towards the abyss. Why have you followed them for so long? I hate them for all the evil they have done to France." And finally, the President yielded.

Thus Laval himself boasts of having prevented the departure of the Government for North Africa. On September 17th a journalist in his service had already given the facts, though with less detail. On that date he wrote an article in which he glorified Laval for having succeeded in keeping the Government in France, at a time when Lebrun, Jeanneney and Herriot "were ready to embark near Perpignan."

Laval, then, was the chief architect of the manœuvre.

It was he who intervened personally with the President and organised delegations of defeatist Deputies and Senators. He found valuable allies in Marquet, Baudouin, perhaps Chautemps. He was helped also by a dangerous individual, Gaston Bergery, who, moving steadily from the extreme Left, ended up as a Fascist. He is a man of real ability, with a gift of biting eloquence, yet with his stiff fair hair and rather wild eyes he always gave me something of the impression one gets from a vicious child.

The capitulationists won, and France yielded. Between the armistice with Germany and the armistice with Italy, Laval became Deputy Premier and Marquet entered the Government. To make room for the Mayor of Bordeaux, Charles Pomaret had to be removed from the Ministry of the Interior, and so this young man was ill-rewarded for his defeatist zeal.

## 2. THE END OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC

### Preparations for the National Assembly.

The fatherland had been surrendered, France was cut in two. More than half her territory was directly under the jackboot of the Fascist invader, but the work of handing over the Republic still needed its final touches. Pétain, I repeat, could not have done it alone, for a task of this magnitude needs complete and healthy faculties. From the signature of the armistice onwards, it began to be clear on what kind of basis the new régime was to be built. There was talk of penitence, of the inevitable sacrifices, of the cult of the family and the nation, and these virtues were served up with every kind of sauce. A certain number of reactionary measures, in the literal and etymological sense of the term, were announced. The old system of Provinces and Provincial Governors, dating from before the French Revolution, was to be re-introduced. Pious homilies and projected reforms, however, were not enough; the Third Republic was to be finally destroyed, its very name suppressed, its motto of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"

obliterated from all public monuments—and all must be done with an *appearance* of legality. Still with an appearance of legality, the Chamber and the Senate had to be induced to abolish the Constitution of 1875 and vote themselves out of existence. Finally, Philippe Pétain was to be made Head of the State for life, and Laval named as his successor.

For such a task, who was better qualified than Pierre Laval himself? Who, better than he, could mould the Parliamentary mass, who better undertake the labour of threat, persuasion and corruption? The same hireling who wrote the article of September 17th, after having praised Laval for making capitulation possible, congratulates him on having destroyed the régime. He shows us the Vice-Premier in the meetings at the Mairie of Bordeaux, at the Municipal Theatre of Bordeaux, and then at Vichy, in the meetings at which the National Assembly was prepared, using "brutal frankness or the accents of emotion," as the occasion demanded. He lauds him for having taught the members of Parliament that "French democracy, in the form in which it had been functioning, must disappear," and for explaining, too, that the new régime would not be reactionary. "A man who has never renounced his peasant origins or Socialist connections" can be trusted to set up a régime in which "the rights of labour will be better defined."

How vividly this faithful portrait brings the scene before one's eyes! I can see Laval, walking with soft steps up and down, taking the arm first of one and then of another, and using on each the arguments that touch him most nearly. He goes gently with the Socialists, tackling each one with great care. He talks to them as a friend—he had kept the habit of using the familiar *tu* when addressing those of us whom he had known in the Party—and with this comradely guise, poses as one of us. He points out how the situation makes these changes inevitable, but that they will not be eternal. The essential is that Parliament shall present an appearance of unanimity. They know him, he says, they can trust him, they know that even if he has left the Party, he has remained on the side of the workers, that he is incapable of doing anything against the interests of the

working-class, and so on, and so on. . . . I can see him exactly as he must have been, ingratiating, unctuous. I can hear as if I had been present the rise and fall of his rather drawling speech. What a cunning scoundrel he is!

VICHY.

The majority must already have been achieved at Bordeaux. In the final meetings at Vichy only the last stages remained to be completed. On the eve of the National Assembly, Chamber and Senate met separately. We have only the most fragmentary information about these meetings, but the dominant impression appears to be one of confusion. The majority of the members had not understood the situation. They thought capitulation inevitable, inevitable also some provisional régime, which for the most part they did not see as Fascism. Edouard Herriot, wearied by his unceasing efforts, seems not to have been among the least unprepared. More than ever, he must have felt it his duty to stand by the "sick mother," and he spoke of the need for "an austere Republic." On the following day, in the National Assembly he refrained, officially, from casting a vote. Yet there had been a day when he came down from the Presidential chair to fight on the floor of the Chamber against the granting of too extensive plenary powers!

In the National Assembly, the members of the Left who abstained from voting were fairly numerous. (It should be remembered that in France, abstention is not the same as merely not voting; the abstaining member declares specifically his intention not to cast a vote.) Albert Sérol and Georges Monnet were among those who went over to what Marx used to call "Parliamentary cretinism." It appears that these two, both convinced resisters, abstained on the pretext that as members of the preceding Cabinet, they were required by custom not to vote against their successors! Their thoughts, in other words, were of Parliamentary precedents, at a time when the fate of the Republic and of democracy was at stake.

The Parliamentary Socialist group met, and was unable to reach a decision. Contrary to all precedent in the Party,

members were authorised to vote as they pleased—and this at a time when the question at issue was the setting up of a Fascist régime! And eighty-five Socialists voted for the new Constitution! This would be enough to drive one for ever to despair if one did not know that the eighty-five included many who had been deceived and abused by Laval, who, under the stress of a month's unbearable emotion, had lost their sense of reality. It must be remembered that chaos was complete, that families were separated, fathers seeking sons and wives husbands. And the material chaos turned into spiritual disorder.

Discussion in the National Assembly was stifled, protests left almost unheard. Many Deputies and Senators never went to Vichy. On the other hand, it is definitely known that the Vice-Premier spoke in insulting terms of the passengers on the *Massilia*, and that Herriot rose to administer a severe reproof. Some of those present kept their heads and their courage. Léon Blum, who has passed his sixty-eighth year and was grief-stricken by the turn of events, nevertheless felt it his duty to go to Vichy to vote against Pétain and for the Republic. I know that his attitude gave comfort and courage to many a heartbroken party member, and that many workers were proud to know that their most prominent leader had done his duty in spite of age and fatigue. I have not been able to discover the names of all the Socialists who, like Blum, condemned the new Constitution, but I give here those that have reached me. Vincent Auriol, ever faithful, Marius Moutet, one of Blum's most vigorous colleagues, Paul Ramadier who, though no longer a member of the S.F.I.O., voted consistently with the Socialist resisters, Biondi a Socialist from the Oise Department, and one from the Haute-Vienne, Roche, who had spoken against the new régime at the preparatory session—all these voted against Pétain, as did also a Radical of the old type, Margaine.

Marx Dormoy, as might have been expected, also voted against. He went further; he spoke in the Assembly, stood up boldly to the capitulationists and attacked Fascism. No less courageous was the attitude of Paul-Boncour, who also spoke against the murder of the Republic. Certain members of the Centre and Right also showed courage.

Champetier de Ribes, leader of the Popular Democrats (Left-wing Catholics), the Senator, de Chambrun, the Marquis de Moutiers, and an old moderate Republican, Bonnevay, always the personification of respect for the Constitution, were among those who voted against.[1]

If one is to understand to the full the degradation of the men of Vichy, one must remember that they did not even dare to ask the Assembly to vote directly for the new Constitution. They gave *carte blanche* to Pétain, who thereupon issued four decrees, none of them with a shred of legality, in which he attributed to himself full legislative and executive power, left the Chambers with a theoretical and temporary existence, and named as his heir presumptive Pierre Laval.

HOW FASCISM WAS INSTALLED.

Thus it was that on July 11th, 1940, the Third Republic died and Philippe Pétain became the Head of the French State. To facilitate this operation several Cabinet changes had been made. The two Socialists, Rivière and Février, the independent Socialist, Frossard, and the Radical Chautemps no longer had a place in it. The three former ones, I imagine, resigned, but I suspect that Chautemps was driven out much against his own wish. Instead there came in Alibert, a Royalist *conseiller d'Etat*, who now appears to be playing an important part in Vichy, Henry Lémery, Senator for Martinique and one of the most discredited men in that Chamber, François Piétri, defeatist, friend of Chiappe and a man wholly devoid of political convictions. A few days later the Ministry of Labour was handed over to René Belin. Belin, assistant-secretary of the C.G.T., had already achieved notoriety for his Munichism and defeatism. He is a strongly-built, squat, square-shouldered man, not without some resemblance to Jacques Doriot. Like Doriot, he is not without ability and is in no way

[1] Information reaching London during December indicates that the following names must be added to the list of those who voted against Pétain: two more Socialists, the Senators Louis Gros and Sénès; the old-fashioned Radical Senator Justin Godart; the Radical Senator René Renoult; and another Senator, Hennessy.

hindered by scruples. It was to Belin that was to fall the task of fitting the Trade Unions into the totalitarian framework.

Telegrams informed us that a kind of super Cabinet was to dominate the Ministry as a whole ; it was to be a team of four, Pétain, Head of the State, Laval, Deputy-Premier, Weygand, Minister of National Defence, and Marquet, Minister of the Interior. The four are worth a moment's final consideration. The régime they were to manage had just substituted for the old Republican motto of " Liberty, Equality, Fraternity " a new trilogy, " Labour, Family, Fatherland." And the country thus placed under the ægis of all the family virtues was to be governed by Pétain, married late in life and childless, by Laval who has one daughter, by Weygand whose birth is enveloped in mystery, and by Marquet, the most hardened of bachelors. And so it happens once more that in this tragedy with its moments worthy of Shakespeare, the sinister laughter of the clown mingles again and again with the groans of the victims.

## CHAPTER VIII

# FRANCE TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

### 1. THE SITUATION IN NOVEMBER 1940

FROM JULY TO SEPTEMBER.

I DO not intend to repeat here all that the newspapers have been saying for the last four or five months. But it is perhaps useful, before concluding this book, and without going into details, to cast a glance at the situation created in France by her murderers.

From Mid-July to September the composition of the Pétain Cabinet remained unchanged and it began the task of organising Fascism in France. All kinds of measures were passed with the aim of destroying the Republican spirit; political parties were suppressed, the Freemasons dissolved, Ybarnégaray organised the youth of the country on totalitarian lines. High officials who were Republicans were dismissed. Women were eliminated from political life and even from the sphere of higher education. As in Fascist states, an attempt was made to keep them at home and to restrict their activities to what the Germans call the three K's (*Kirche*, church; *Küche*, kitchen; *Kinder*, children). At the same time, the educational system underwent a reactionary modification by the abolition of the laws providing that State education should be undenominational, and which had at least prevented the Catholic Church from getting a hold on the State. Various arrests were made, but these will be referred to later.

On foreign policy the Government was divided. Some

Ministers sought first and foremost to come to terms with the German conqueror; others nursed fantastic plans for the formation of a *latin bloc* in conjunction with Italy and Spain. Baudouin was one of the latter, but this does not mean that he was anti-Nazi. It must not be forgotten that in the spring of 1939 he was among the reactionaries of the *salons*, who protested against Daladier's decision at long last to request Abetz to leave France.

Moreover, the distinction between the two groups has very little importance, since all the Ministers very soon perceived that the conception of a "latin bloc" was a mirage; that Hitler ruled and Rome was merely the vassal! What was more important was the split in the Cabinet with regard to Great Britain. On the one hand, there were the open enemies of England, and on the other those who, although they had little affection for her, yet grasped that England would not easily go under. Pétain must be included in the latter category, although it must be added that the presence within the Cabinet of elements unwilling to support a strong anti-British policy counted for little when, after Laval's journey to Paris, the Government was persuaded to fall into line with the totalitarian régimes.

### The Germanophiles from Doriot to Déat.

During the months of July, August and September the Germanophiles made great efforts to persuade the Government to adopt a policy of complete submission to Berlin. There were first the direct agents of Hitler in Paris, whose voice was that of the Press and the wireless—for the Paris wireless was merely an echo of Berlin and the newspapers were all more or less blatantly Nazi, from the turncoat Paris edition of *Paris-Soir* to the heavy-handed propaganda of *La France au Travail*, not forgetting *Le Matin*, which continued to play the rôle of a French *Völkischer Beobachter*, and the rag run by Jacques Doriot.

Doriot is, it will be remembered, the leader of the French Popular Party, and was a Communist before he became a Fascist. He is a big, heavily built fellow who knows how

to talk to the masses—a born demagogue in fact, trained by Moscow, whom he used to serve. To-day he serves the dictators and Hitler in particular. His activities are not limited to Paris and the occupied zone. He has agents all over France, and especially in Marseilles.

In July, August and September, Doriot and his kind were saying at Germany's behest that Vichy was reactionary, that Germany was a revolutionary country and that England—at whose expense no abuse was spared—was a country of plutocrats. And Parliamentarians were not lacking in Vichy to fall in with their plans. There was, for instance, Marcel Déat, the leader of the French Neo-Socialists, one of those who "terrified" Léon Blum, who was writing in the *Œuvre* and who, because he was a teacher of philosophy not without a talent for oratory, would have liked the Socialists to see in him a second Jaurès. His political evolution has been greatly affected by this disappointed ambition. A little thick-set man, with a cold vehemence of manner, there is nothing of the great man about him. He has consistently advocated a policy of rapprochement between Berlin and Paris, although somewhat less crudely than Doriot. He wants France to be incorporated in the "New Order" of Adolf Hitler; he wants France to experience her own National-Socialist Revolution. He uses the misery of unoccupied France as a weapon for persuading her to adopt an anti-British policy in the hope of obtaining the suppression of the barriers between the two zones. He himself has returned to Paris with his paper without waiting for this to be achieved. Similar views are held by that tortuous, and woolly-minded mystic, the former Socialist Minister, Charles Spinasse, joint editor with another Socialist, Paul Rives, of the paper *Effort*. Both are ardent supporters of Pétain and of a Nationalist-Socialist revolution. They explain that, in signing the Armistice, France has by implication accepted Hitlerian domination. This is also the line taken—behind the scenes—by Georges Bonnet and by Pierre-Etienne Flandin, whom, according to certain reports, Laval met at the German Embassy during his visit to Paris at the end of August.

LAVAL'S VISIT TO PARIS IN AUGUST AND ITS RESULTS.

Laval's visit to Paris merits some attention. Ever since the Armistice Laval must have cherished the hope of meeting Hitler and of coming to an understanding with him—thinking, no doubt, so great is his conceit, that he would have Hitler " in his pocket," like any horse-dealer in his native Châteldon. At the end of August, de Brinon (his agent in Paris) later to be nominated official Ambassador of the Pétain Government, arranged an interview with some high Nazi officials, but not at that juncture with the Führer himself. The first result of the visit was revealed on September 6th. On Laval's return to Vichy there was a Government reshuffle designed, without any doubt, to make clear France's first steps towards " Gleichschaltung." All the Parliamentarians without exception were dropped—even Lémery, even Ybarnégaray. Marquet went too, and it was suggested to me later that he had not shown himself sufficiently adaptable in his relations with the Germans, and had perhaps not been ruthless enough where his former political friends were concerned. His place was taken by Peyrouton, the son-in-law of Malvy, a tool of the Fascists, and absolutely unscrupulous. Huntziger, from whom better things might have been expected, was made Minister for War, and Weygand was sent out as High Commissioner for North Africa in order to try to prevent the French colonies from going over to the free Frenchmen led by General de Gaulle.

This was a Fascist Government which, notwithstanding all the declarations by Pétain and his followers that France had no wish to imitate foreign régimes, embarked on a servile imitation of totalitarian systems. First, there were more and more arrests. Mandel, Daladier, Guy la Chambre—Daladier's former Air Minister—had already been arrested and were to appear before the court set up at Riom to try those responsible for France's disaster. A warrant had also been issued for the arrest of Pierre Cot. Paul Reynaud, General Gamelin and Léon Blum were to be arrested after the September visit to Paris. Then recourse was made to arrests on the Hitlerian model, without any specific charge.

Marx Dormoy, Vincent Auriol, Salomon Grumbach, the former Radical Minister of the Interior, Schrameck, Jules Moch, who had held office in the Blum Government, had been a naval officer during the war and was partly responsible for the discovery of the means of combating magnetic mines. There were others, too, such as Montel, Léon Blum's secretary, and many more whose names we do not even know! A large number of alleged Communists have been arrested, many of whom are doubtless Socialists.

At the same time, Socialist municipalities which were becoming centres of resistance were being dissolved, among them Montluçon, Vienne, Toulouse, Avignon, Lyons, which had a Radical majority but where "resisters" must have been legion. There was a rumour, later denied, that Herriot, the Mayor of Lyons, had been arrested. He is in all probability kept under police surveillance like many political figures—like Jouhaux, for example, the former secretary of the C.G.T.

Racial discrimination has been introduced for the first time in France, religious discrimination for the first time since 1789. The Civil Service, University teaching, the management of industrial concerns, of theatres and cinemas are henceforth careers closed to Jews. The C.G.T. has been dissolved and corporatism has been introduced. And in order to make a pretence of impartiality, the big employers' associations, the *Comité des Forges* and the *Comité des Houillères* have also been dissolved. This is mere eyewash; the big trusts remain powerful. In August, de Wendel of the *Comité des Forges* even brought off a deal with the Germans, by which he handed over in return for a handsome profit his rights in the metallurgical industries of Lorraine. In other words, France is copying the mock anti-capitalism practised by the invader.

### Peace with Hitler.

While France was toeing the line, Fernand de Brinon was continuing to negotiate in Paris, and in October Pierre Laval received permission to meet Hitler. The bases of

an agreement were apparently found and in his turn Marshal Pétain paid on October 24th a formal visit to the victor. We can omit the depressing details of the interview. . . . The Press announced the signing of a peace treaty as imminent and France's assumption, at Hitler's wish, of her "new European rôle." Hitler, it was assumed, was prepared *apparently* to reduce the military occupation, to put an apparent end to the separation between the two Frances, to bring the Government back to Paris, to liberate two million prisoners of war and to leave France in possession of several of her colonies.

Yet the advantage to the Führer of the division of France into two zones as laid down in the armistice terms in June was undeniable. It weakened the country, it permitted the existence of a Government in Vichy which was not officially at war with England, and this was not, on occasion, without its advantages. If France were not divided and weakened, it would be difficult to maintain armed occupation without frequent incidents which would necessitate the strengthening of the occupying forces. As long as the peace treaty remained unsigned, Germany was able to avoid giving Italy her share of the spoils. And, finally, once the fiction of "a scrap of Free France" ceased, the colonies might perhaps rebel and go over *en masse* to General de Gaulle.

Hitler undoubtedly reflected on these arguments during the month of July. But English resistance may have led him to change his plans, and, moreover, arguments which are valid when total occupation of the country is contemplated are not valid when applied to the fictitious entity of an independent France. In October the Führer's most pressing need was to incorporate France in the "New Order," to bring her into the war against England and to pose to the world as the ruler of Europe.

And yet . . . days pass and still peace is not signed. Mussolini is doubtless displeased to see the position Hitler is willing to give to France, but the objections of his "brilliant second" whose army in Greece would seem to be inspired by Caporetto rather than by the Piave, would hardly be likely to cause the Führer seriously to modify his plans. The real explanation of the failure—at least

temporary—of the Hitler-Laval plan lies in the growing strength of French resistance, as a result of which the French Government dare not become too closely involved with Hitlerian Germany. It is impossible to say whether a Franco-German peace treaty will or will not be signed during Anglo-German hostilities. All that we can say is that in mid-November Hitler, having simply annexed Alsace-Lorraine, expelled tens of thousands of French-speaking Lorrainers from their homes—which would hardly seem to be a promising harbinger of reconciliation and peace. But who knows what will happen next? What is important here is the incontrovertible fact of French resistance. The seeds of revolt are beginning to germinate.[1]

### Resistance in the two Frances.

Let us consider briefly the present position in occupied and in unoccupied France. First, it cannot be too often repeated that the people have never understood the meaning of the Armistice, and that *the Armistice terms have never been published.* For many weeks Pétain's colleagues attributed the collapse to England, and not merely to the inadequacy of the British military effort during the early months—which the English themselves admit. They have added to the charge some odious lies. Baudouin, in particular, has excelled himself and, forgetting Dunkirk, forgetting the achievement of the R.A.F., has tried to spread the belief that the British effort was negligible, that Great Britain had always intended France to "pull her chestnuts out of the fire." The incident at Mers-el-Kébir was deliberately and dishonestly distorted.

At first this propaganda was successful. France was so unhappy! But, almost immediately, unoccupied France experienced all kinds of privations: it must not be forgotten

[1] Since this book went to press, a Palace revolution has taken place in Vichy, bringing Flandin into office and leading to much discussion between Pétain and Abetz over the position of Laval. There is doubtless more to come, but none of these events in any way affects the judgments pronounced here.

that this zone comprises less than half of France—is not only less fertile, but was at the time of the Armistice over-populated, crammed with refugees—and that two million soldiers were prisoners of war. The confusion and dismay of France can easily be imagined, the more so as to the French a German victory then appeared inevitable and British resistance doomed to failure.

But July passed, then August, then September . . . and England still resisted, and resisted victoriously. So hope began to come back to France. The B.B.C. was listened to more and more, often even in cafés, even in the open-air. Charles Maurras complained about it in the *Action Française*. In September, the official press was obliged to check the rising wave of pro-British feeling. At the same time everything pointed to the growing unpopularity of Vichy. The French people remained democratic. Spinasse and his band of pseudo-Socialists met with no success. Local Socialist parties met in secret. René Belin's " corporatist " experiments encountered opposition from the best Trade Union elements. Working-class resistance was making itself felt and riots were reported at Toulouse, at Limoges.

In occupied France anti-British propaganda was of course noisier, but its success was more short-lived. The Nazis can be relied upon to do their own anti-German propaganda in the countries they enslave. At first they behaved with great correctness—particularly in Paris. But, little by little, the occupation became more repressive. The Gestapo was in command, racial laws were introduced and the people began to experience the familiar reactions. The French saw themselves robbed of the best of their agricultural produce, German women came to buy French goods—to practice legalised pillage rather—thanks to the overvalued mark. And all the time their indignation rose as they watched the value of the franc fall from day to day.

The news from England was in consequence welcomed with enthusiasm and, in spite of prohibitions and penalties, the B.B.C. was listened to whenever possible. France had again become friendly to Great Britain, and she cannot have forgotten the "anti-boche" propaganda of certain French ultra-nationalists—now for the most part defeatists

—before Hitler's victory. Anger against the invader grew. Even as far back as August, the *Matin* was complaining of the lack of respect shown by Parisians towards German officers. Nor was the resistance limited to sullen silence. The working-class began to organise underground resistance; there was sabotage in factories, and it is known that in the engineering works of the Paris region, workmen have been shot by the Germans.

And the movement will grow, for the French are essentially a nation whose inventive genius forms a superb equipment for sabotage. Frenchwomen will help, too, for they are not Fascist, in spite of all the statements made by elderly Senators and Radicals, affirming that women suffrage would bring Fascism! Women have still no right to vote and yet Fascism has come all the same. In the task of resisting the invader they will prove to be no less resolute or less ingenious than the men.

For the first time the Nazis are confronted by a people which for centuries has not known subjection to foreign rule. It is a new experience for them. At the moment of writing, neutral journalists in France estimate the proportion of French people who are on the side of England at 90 per cent. in the unoccupied zone and at almost 100 per cent. in the occupied regions. If Laval succeeds in concluding an agreement with Hitler, there will no doubt be rejoicing over the return of the prisoners of war, but it will only be shortlived, for the two million prisoners will come back in a mood of bitter anger against the Nazis.

*These, then, are the elements of France to-day; steadily growing in number, every day more recognisable, they are the forces from which will spring the new French revolution.*

## 2. THE PROSPECT FOR THE FUTURE

### The Need for a Democratic Revolution in France.

If, instead of being an unemployed war correspondent, I was, like some of my friends, an officer in the Free French Forces, I should refrain from all political discussion, to think

only of those things that can unite Free France. In existing circumstances, I feel that my position is nearer to that of those French Conservatives who are resolved to fight side by side with England, than to that of defeatist Socialists. But I am a French writer and journalist, a democrat and Socialist. I have both the right and the duty to take part in politics and to write of things as I see them. Now I know that, in the words of my political mentor, Bracke-Desrousseaux, the best Marxist in France and perhaps the greatest Greek scholar of his age, "all civil wars are international wars to-day, and all international wars are civil wars." The war that has now been going on in the world for some years, not merely since 1939, is an international civil war. The struggle lies between the new forces of democracy, which, whether all democrats realise it or not, are moving towards Socialism, and the forces of the old barbarism, even if this latter boasts of its youth and has stolen for its own use words like "revolution" and "Socialism." In other words, the war we are now waging is a revolutionary war. Even General de Gaulle, who does not meddle in politics, has affirmed that "we are in the midst of a revolutionary era."

Professor Harold Laski, in a recent *Penguin*, has explained better than I can hope to do the revolutionary character of the present struggle of the democracies. I propose to survey a more limited field, and to speak only of France. And of France I say that a revolutionary ferment is at work, and that it is the duty of Great Britain and her allies to help to bring about the explosion. I hope that timid readers will not misunderstand me; the choice in this matter is not theirs to make. It is of no use their considering whether or not a French revolution is in their view a desirable thing. A new French revolution is inevitable and the only question is whether it shall be a democratic or a Communist revolution. The dilemma is unavoidable, and the democracies must make up their minds; if they do not help the revolutionary forces in France, the Communists will do it for them.

I can imagine many objections; the reader will think of all the mistakes of the Communists, of the unspeakable Russo-German pact. I have already said what I think of

Bolshevism and its methods and I have nothing to withdraw. But everything seems to show that to-day the French Communists are working in secret against the invader. Their misdeeds date from last year and the years before that, but the misdeeds of the rulers of France are still going on day by day. If the French workers and middle classes think that only the Communists can bring them salvation, they will line up behind the Bolsheviks. But I hasten to add that a Communist success is by no means inevitable and that the revolution can be made by democrats and Socialists. There is, however, one condition; it is that the democrats and Socialists shall receive the help of the democrats of Great Britain and her allies.

But, it will be asked, how can it be done? It can be done by doing propaganda for democracy, ceaseless propaganda by every possible means, by wireless, by leaflets, through the Press, and by speaking to the democrats of France and of the French colonies—and they are an enormous majority—in a language they can understand. Democracy, others will say, has been guilty of many mistakes, and has sometimes been lacking in authority. This is undeniable, but the mistakes are not to be laid at the door of the régime or of its principles; they are the result of an abnormal functioning of the régime or of a lack of respect for its principles. The régime was undermined by its enemies, thanks to the weakness of the democrats who allowed them to do it. The evil is the fruit, not of too much democracy, but of too little. Let us not play with words. Here again the dilemma is unavoidable; either we side with Hitler and Mussolini or we side with the democracies; there is no middle term.

I have heard, too, of Frenchmen who think themselves free expressing rather mocking doubts about the Parliamentary régime. It is obvious that the Parliamentary régime has not always functioned well in France. But whose fault is that? It is the fault precisely of men like Daladier, who stripped Parliament of its proper rights and were impatient of its supervision. There has been talk also of Parliamentary corruption, and much could be written on this point. I claim, however, that the great majority of the Deputies

were honest, but that some were indeed corrupt. I would go further and admit that corruption has increased in recent years, but by corruption I mean less corruption by bribery than corruption by patronage, undue influence, negligence or collusion. And it must always be remembered that the greatest corrupters in Parliament were the friends of Fascism, like André Tardieu and Laval.

Let us then not be afraid to tell the French to fight for what they have lost, their democratic liberties. This will not mean a return to the wrong application of the principles of democracy, so wrong as to be contrary to the principles of democracy itself, but rather to the same principles strictly interpreted and pushed to their logical conclusion. From that will come the emancipation of the people of France.

### Confidence in France.

In recent months I have passed like many others through days of desolation and despair. I saw how far the rot had spread through the governing classes, how the middle classes too have been affected, how they had so far lost all social sense that fiscal evasion and the export of capital for this purpose had become normal in their eyes. And there is no reason to hide the fact that the lower middle classes, even the working-classes had not escaped the prevalent contagion. The ordinary men and women of France were not wholly compounded of virtue. The example of their " betters " affected them, too, their moral fibre weakened, and became *petit bourgeois*. The café, the motor-cycle and indifferent films played too large a part in their lives; they did not read as much as they used to. The Socialist party-worker in the thirties, the man who had grown up during the war, showed less intellectual curiosity than his fellow-member whose youth had been spent in the years before 1914. And what, I think, has shocked me most of all is a certain falling-off in the feeling of human solidarity. Let me explain; the war in China, the Spanish war, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia failed to arouse in the feelings of the workers the deep emotions that one might

reasonably have expected. Only a minority felt all these things deeply.

But I have not lost confidence. The most recent news of the state of feeling in France should give us all confidence. I am convinced *that the heart and mind of the mass of the French people is sound.* And here I am not thinking exclusively of the peasants and workers. I am sure that the hour of trial will bring into the light of day the fundamental qualities of France. Even some of the middle bourgeoisie must be throwing off some of the poison of *Gringoire* and beginning to wake up. . . .

I remember a remark of Giraudoux. Germany, he said one day, had its Goethe, but the customs officer of the Provençal village of Carqueiranne is also a Goethe. He was trying in this brief hyperbole to epitomise the idea that in Germany balance of mind is a rare quality, while in France it is a common experience.

France is a country with a long-standing tradition of rationalism. It is the land of common sense. Those who have often had the opportunity to make public speeches there have always been impressed by the intelligence of their audiences. They seize every point the speaker makes and no subtlety is beyond them. The Frenchman is a reasoning animal, a political animal, with a real love of the interplay of ideas.

No, my friends in every corner of France, I cannot despair of you, cannot think of you without affection. I think of the peasant of eastern France with his "slow, silent walk" and passionate love of the soil, of the Lorrainer and the Alsatian, Frenchmen "just the same," of the peasant of Normandy, whose crafty smile lights up his high-coloured face, who holds fast to his land and his liberty, of the rough Breton fisherman, worthy of the poetic legend that surrounds him, of the weavers of the northern towns and the miners of the Pas-de-Calais, so capable of savage heroism when the spirit of revolt stirs within them, of the man of the south-west whose delicate wit can live side by side with pride and endurance, of the Parisian workman, mocking and sometimes uproarious, whose teasing vivacity of mind hides the most heroic

qualities of his race, of the jovial and solid Burgundian, of the man of the central plateau, with his fierce tenacity, of the Gascon, dreamy and pugnacious, of the Provençal peasant whose quiet happiness dwells in one of the most civilised creatures that ever walked the earth. . . .

The thought of these men and women gives one new confidence. The breath of revolution will blow again over France, of the revolution that will complete the victory of Great Britain and the democracies, if it has not already been able to cleave a way for it.

Friends of the Anglo-Saxon lands, democrats of all the world, you shall have your France again, our France, the France of which Gabriele d'Annunzio said one day—saving your reverence, Benito Mussolini—that without her indeed, " the world would be alone."

LONDON, LOUIS LÉVY
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